

## “THE DESCENT OF MAN.”\*

It seems that some theory of the subjects upon which the Bible is written is necessary to the satisfaction of the human mind. Those who turn away from the Scriptures are incessantly labouring to supply their place by some other authority. In these efforts it is natural for such people to begin at the “beginning,” and the first chapters of the New Revelation must be on “Genesis.” Separate contributions to this Bible of reason have been made at intervals from Aristotle down to Laplace; but recently men have waited for its authoritative condensation and promulgation by the author of the “Origin of Species.” The oracle has now spoken; but we think the utterance is imperfect, and the voice uncertain. He does not assert the infallibility of his science so strongly as he does the fallibility of Scripture. “Natural selection may have done much,” in the “struggle for life;” but he is prepared to admit that he has exaggerated its importance. “It is easier to believe” that one species has produced another, than that there have been separate creations. Everything is yet undecided, except that the ancient dogma of man’s immediate creation by God must be renounced. So that Moses, who somehow survived the pretensions of Manetho and Berosus, and the more recent attacks of Ewald and Colenso, must yield before the “most distinguished of British naturalists.” Lepsius and Champollion, by their researches in sepulchres and mummy cases, have only illustrated the history written by the “son of Pharaoh’s daughter;” and philologists, from Schlegel to Max Müller, have found in Sanskrit, Ethiopic, and Chinese unlooked-for corroboration of his veracious “wisdom.” Jesus Christ quoted Moses as an authority on the “descent of man;” (Matt. xix. 4;) and St. Paul founded the theology which he preached and taught upon the historic reality of Adam, and upon the consequent unity of the human race. (Acts xvii., and Rom. v.) But so completely is the oldest historian of the world superseded in Mr. Darwin’s estimation, that he never mentions his name, and only makes one or two somewhat contemptuous allusions to his antiquated opinions. All the world will hear of this bold repudiation of a name that seemed sure of its long-borne aureole, and a religious periodical cannot let it pass without comment. There are many always ready to say that theological prejudice continually ignores scientific discovery; and some youthful readers are wondering whether the clamorous assertions of the unworthiness of Scripture made now-a-days may not have right on their side. So we must hear what Mr. Darwin has to say, and how far evidence supports him.

At the commencement we may observe, that Mr. Darwin is not an Atheist; for he speaks of the “Creator,” and of a “Higher Power.”

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\* “The Descent of Man, and Selection in relation to Sex. By C. Darwin, M.A., F.R.S., etc.” In two volumes. London: John Murray.

That there exists a "Creator and Ruler of the Universe has been affirmed by the highest intellects that have ever lived." \* How this conclusion has been reached he does not inform us. As he says nothing in favour of the only Book that can claim to be a revelation from God, we suppose the higher "intellects" have arrived at the notion of the Supreme by intuition. This view of his opinions is confirmed by his ascription of all improvement in religion to the progress of reason. In speaking of the superstitions of heathenism, he says, "Many of these are terrible to think of, such as the sacrifice of human beings to a blood-loving God; the trial of innocent persons by the ordeal of poison or fire; witchcraft, and the like. Yet it is well occasionally to reflect on these superstitions; for they show us what an infinite debt of gratitude we owe to the improvement of our reason, to science, and our accumulated knowledge. As Sir J. Lubbock has well observed, 'It is not too much to say, that the horrible dread of unknown evil hangs like a thick cloud over savage life, and embitters every pleasure.' " † Thus the operation of revealed truth, and especially of Christianity, is not mentioned among the factors of the world's emancipation from superstition, except as they may be included under the description of "science and our accumulated knowledge." Again, we are told that "the highest form of religion, the grand idea of God hating sin and loving righteousness, was unknown during primeval times." ‡ This is, of course, a deliberate denial of any primeval revelation, and a substantial assertion that man is the creator of his own religion, and the author of his own salvation. So that if Mr. Darwin is not an atheist, he is a deist of the most defined type, and his science is the handmaid of his theology. His book is, strictly speaking, written with a theological aim, and is animated with a strong theological spirit. His object is to overturn the old theology, and to set up a new one, which believes in a Creator, but not in "special creations;" and in a "Ruler of the Universe," who never interferes in its inevitable progress.

Man, then, according to Darwinism, did not come into existence a few thousand years ago by a special act of the Creator, but has been "evolved" by natural processes from the lower creatures. The immediate progenitors of the civilized races were barbarians and savages, whose record is not in written history, nor in buried temples, or shattered slabs, but in flint gravels and limestone caves. The forefathers of these wild men, again, were yet inferior races, with skulls and frames more like the orang-outang, or chimpanzee, who also belonged to the same order as the anthropomorphous ape, from which we all "descend." One of these primates, owing to some change in his manner of living, dwelt less in the trees and more upon the ground. He was thus compelled to become a biped, and so the feet were rendered flat, the great toe was peculiarly modified, and lost the power of prehension. The family of this ape became more and more erect, the pelvis broader, the spine peculiarly curved, and the head differently fixed. The jaws became less, and the canine teeth reduced. "All these changes have been attained by man," says Mr. Darwin. § Not a single specimen of man in this transition state has ever been

\* Vol. i., p. 65. † *Ibid.*, p. 68. ‡ *Ibid.*, p. 182. § *Ibid.*, p. 141, etc.

found; but we are to believe what we are told. So he goes on to say, that with the improvement of mental faculties came an enlargement of the brain, although mental activity is not always associated with relative increase in this respect. "The brain of an ant is one of the most marvellous atoms of matter in the world—perhaps more marvellous than the brain of man." Certainly man is naked, and the ape is not; but *perhaps the genus homo* gradually divested itself of this covering through "sexual selection." Some have thought, that as the elephant has lost his wool through living in a hot climate, so man might have lost his by the same cause; but men in tropical countries have plenty of hair on their heads, which are exposed to the sun. So that the new power, "sexual selection," must come in to answer for this change also. As man agrees in general appearance with the anthropomorphous apes, "we may infer that some ancient member of this sub-group gave birth to man..... There can, consequently, hardly be a doubt that man is an offshoot from the Old-World Simian stem; and that, under a genealogical point of view, he must be classed with the Catarrhine division."\* Having, then, derived man from "a hairy quadruped, furnished with a tail and pointed ears, arboreal in his habits, and an inhabitant of the Old World," curiosity will ask what was the scene of his first appearance? But this cannot be decisively answered. Africa was once inhabited by *man's nearest allies*, the extinct apes and gorillas; but some large apes are also found in the Miocene remains of Europe. The time of the divergence of the Catarrhine stock in the direction of humanity *may have been as early as the Eocene period*. Having, then, bridged the difference between man and monkeys, it is not difficult to pursue the lineage still further. After the Simiadæ come the Lemuridæ, and then the Marsupials, followed by birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fishes, all of which *may be supposed* to have had a common origin. The zoological scale thus descended brings us, through the lancelet, which has scarcely a brain or heart, and called by some a worm, down to the Ascidiæ, which are "invertebrate, hermaphrodite, marine creatures, permanently attached to a support. They hardly appear like animals, and consist of a simple, tough, leathery sack, with two small projecting orifices." A group of animals resembling the larvæ of present Ascidiæ branched out in two ways: the first, moving somewhat retrograde, became Ascidiæ proper; the second ascended until it reached the vertebrate and human development.

Mr. Darwin does not trace the genealogy further back than the Ascidian mollusc, which lives in a bag instead of a shell. How this creature came at first to the sea-rock, where he commenced his amazing history, and from what lower creature he "descended," and how the original organism was brought out of the inorganic, we are not informed. Was there a "special creation" after all? If so, the theory of "natural selection," and all its co-operating powers, will not exclude the dogmas of creation and the supernatural. So that the chronicler of the ancient "Genesis," who records that God said, "Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life," has yet a leg to stand upon. Considering that our author traces man to so low a beginning, his book would have

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\* Vol. i., pp. 196, 197.

been better named, “The Ascent of Man.” For the fish to become a reptile, and climb to the dry land, and then to mount the tree as an opossum and monkey, and, lastly, to become the builder of pyramids and tubular bridges, indicates a considerable elevation of nature and office. However, the name which Mr. Darwin gives to his own theory may have a propriety too profound for him to suspect; for his sagacious and industrious intellect can hardly be classed with the profoundest.

The only evidence which Mr. Darwin can properly claim in support of this extraordinary pedigree is the remarkable resemblance in anatomical construction and in “embryonic” history between man and the lower animals. The human bones, muscles, viscera, and nerves correspond to those of the monkey, the bat, and the seal. Man and his animal neighbours may communicate diseases to each other, as hydrophobia and variola, and monkeys have been known to get drunk and to smoke tobacco! The “embryonic” resemblance of all mammals, and the lunar periods which development follows, have often been observed. So have those organs and members of the body which in man are rudimentary, but are fully developed in the lower creatures. The external part of the ear is of very little service to men and monkeys, but horses, asses, and hares can erect and turn them in any direction. There is a pointing near the top of the outer margin of the ear which is yet more defined in some monkeys, and this *may be*, Mr. Darwin says, the remaining witness of our descent from a creature with pointed ears. The nictitating membrane, or third eyelid, which is possessed by reptiles and birds, is rudimentary in man. So is the hairy hide of the ape, which now only appears in patches of hair on man’s otherwise unclothed body. The posterior-molar, or wisdom teeth, are tending to a rudimentary condition, as is also a visceral appendage known as the *cæcum*. The similarity even descends to particulars, such as the apertures in the *humerus*, through which sometimes in man a nerve and artery are conducted as they always are in some quadrupeds. So the pelvic bones of the spine are followed by the *os coccyx*,—the rudimentary tail; *mammæ* appear on the breasts of the human male; and by some occult law of reversion, organs which animals possess occasionally reappear in man.

Such resemblances, Mr. Darwin believes, can only be accounted for by a physical descent and sequence. “The grounds upon which this conclusion rests will never be shaken, for the close similarity between man and the lower animals in embryonic development, as well as in innumerable points of structure and of constitution, both of high and of the most trifling importance,—the rudiments which he retains, and the abnormal reversions to which he is occasionally liable,—are facts which cannot be disputed, .....It is incredible that all these facts should speak falsely. He who is not content to look like a savage at the phenomena of nature as disconnected, cannot any longer believe that man is the work of a separate act of creation. He will be forced to admit that the close resemblance of the embryo of man to that, for instance, of a dog.....and a crowd of analogous facts,—all point in the plainest manner to the conclusion, that man is the co-descendant with other mammals of a common progenitor.”\* Notwith-

standing this loud assertion of the overwhelming nature of his argument, he is constrained to allow that he has but "the young and rising naturalists" for his disciples; while "of the older and honoured chiefs of natural science many unfortunately are opposed to evolution in every form." It seems, after all, that Darwinism is a faith and not a science. The older naturalists refuse to account for certain facts as do Messrs. Darwin and Huxley, though these gentlemen think there is no alternative. Now it is not necessary for us to refute a theory upon which scientific men are not agreed. We may suspend our judgment, or wait till another explanation is offered.

No one will deny that man and the lower creatures are susceptible of much variation in form through the operation of climate and other circumstances. Hence there are different groups of the human family and a yet greater variety of the canine and other races. We allow all this, and also that this law of variation would be as powerful in ancient time as now. But we do not concede that this law was something different anciently from what it is now, or that while now it is limited to the modification of animals within the range of their specific characters, formerly it included the development of one species out of another. This is one of Mr. Darwin's assumptions, which he tries to carry by stratagem rather than by reason. We could fill pages with such phrases as, "It may be inferred," "We have reason to believe," "There can scarcely be a doubt," "Only prejudice will deny." But in a book which repudiates everything miraculous in Christianity and Scripture, and ignores the positive evidences for the truth of Revelation, we require something more than any man's belief or supposition: we want to hear what is positively known in contradiction of the old opinions. Does Mr. Darwin *know* that man was made without a "special creation," or could have been so made; or does he *know* that he emerged slowly from the brutish condition by evolution? No, he only "infers" it, and thinks "no other conclusion possible."

Neither is he able to mention a very large number of authorities on his side. If his theory be true, it would be necessary to show the extreme antiquity of man. For this he quotes such writers as M. Boucher de Perthes, whose observations have scarcely extended beyond the gravel drifts of a few French valleys, and Sir C. Lyell, whose book on this subject only shows how uncertain is everything connected with it. Mr. Huxley is his authority for the assertion that the ape is not more distant from man than it is from the lower members of its own order. Sir J. Lubbock, with Messrs. Tyler and M'Lennan are his authorities for the denial of Scripture history and all ancient tradition on the primeval condition of man. These writers are thoroughly pledged to the doctrine of aboriginal barbarism and the natural origin of life and civilization. The whole question seems to have fallen into the hands of a literary clique. Mr. Huxley quotes Mr. Darwin, and Mr. Darwin refers to Mr. Huxley. Sir J. Lubbock and Sir C. Lyell are authorities with both of them; and these again never forget to make good use of the names of their friends. May we say, "Ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you?"

The intellect of man so manifestly exceeds that of any of the brutes, that it has always presented a formidable objection to development

theories. But the philosophers have always differed about the nature of mind, and have not decided whether the reason of brutes differs in kind or only in degree from that of man. Mr. Darwin takes advantage of the doubt, and cuts the knot which no one has untied. He pronounces that they differ in degree only, and not in kind. This assumption lies at the foundation of his theory, and its subversion by some acute thinker would endanger his entire system. And this is the "science" of the nineteenth century, before which Moses and Paul are to bow their heads as benighted illusionists, deceived by their own deceptions! For the credit of British philosophy, Mr. Darwin should withdraw all pretensions to metaphysics, and still more to such a proficiency in them as to enable him to settle the controversies of the ages. The animals have perceptions of things, but not of truths. The ox does not see what we see in the flower among the grass, nor in the stream where he slakes his thirst. The horse remembers the way he has journeyed before, but combines no new idea with his recollection: it is but a revival of the old impression. The animal may dream, and thus have a quasi-imagination; but he has not the faculty which finds

"tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

The animal may be capable of a limited progress. Old birds and old foxes are wiser than young ones; horses show their blood and training; the ravenous wolf of antiquity may be the progenitor of the self-mastered dog that obeys the shepherd's call. But man has become a philosopher, a poet, and an inventor. The relative capacity of intellect between a wolf and a dog is very little altered. We do not allow for a moment that the savage is as far below the philosopher as the ape is below the savage. Take the savage child from his mother's breast, and he might be trained to understand what Mr. Darwin has said of him. But the young ape could never be made to tremble before an Unseen Power, or to put his thoughts into words, though they were but the clicked accents of the Bosjesmen. There is yet a chasm between man's intellect and the brute's which no line will span that Mr. Darwin can fling.

It follows naturally, in a theory which derives human form from a semi-oyster, and the human intellect from its consciousness, to regard conscience as the product of social instinct, and religion as the development of savage dreams. Mr. Darwin having supplied a new "genesis" of the physical and intellectual man, does not hesitate to describe the "descent" of religion. The primeval idiot saw strange images in his sleep, which followed him when he awoke. He straightway peopled the solitary mountain and glen with these fictions of his fancy, and invented his "fetish," and then his image to protect him from these ghostly enemies. In time he became a monotheist, and a Christian, but only by the development of his original hallucinations. This is "easier to believe" than that "man was originally endowed with the ennobling belief in the existence of an omnipotent God." But religion did not imply the working of conscience. This came by the operation of social instinct. After society was formed, certain individuals began to feel regret when they preferred their own enjoyment to the general good, and so they began to

be sensible of that inward terror which "doth make cowards of us all." Mr. Darwin thinks that "any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well developed, or nearly as well developed, as in man." \* In enunciating this dictum our author pretty well contradicts himself; for he says, that such a creature as man—as sociable, and nearly as intellectual,—would be possessed of a conscience too. So that it would not be necessary for the "social instinct" to produce it. Yet he speaks of the creature "acquiring conscience" and intellect, as if he had seen the ape somewhere given to the study of nature or to paroxysms of repentance over his misdeeds. The whole theory is an outrage upon philosophy and history as well as upon religion. If mere social instinct could make men better, the world ought not to be so vile to-day as it is. The longer nations existed, the purer should they become; but all history says the opposite. Egypt, Greece, and Rome were viler at last than at first. Vice has sapped the foundations of every civilization the world has seen, except the Christian. And what is the secret of its power to purify and maintain society? Not the development of some innate excellence of fallen humanity, but its perpetual infusion of a new and heavenly life into the souls of them who are "born from above."

In conclusion, we may repeat what has been said before in these pages, that the discovery of human remains does not favour the idea that man has come by intermediate steps from the monkey tribes. No specimens of any such race have ever been found. The earliest relics are implements; but no monkey makes a tool. He may crack his nut with a stone; but he never fashions the nut-cracker. With the very earliest traces of humanity in Europe are associated marks of the use of fire and of pottery. The men of the reindeer period were sculptors and engravers, and it would require more time to develop the Simian hand to artistic uses than Sir C. Lyell can show to have occurred from the beginning of the ape period until the date of these early artificers. Mr. Darwin promises that when other portions of the world are investigated, remains of the "missing link" between us and the quadrumana may be found. We can afford to wait until then, and shall be ready to allow, if such discoveries are ever made, that his theory at last is not without the shadow of a proof.