

WITH SAMUEL SMITH'S COMPLIMENTS.



“THE ASCENT OF MAN.”

BY PROFESSOR HENRY DRUMMOND.


A Review

BY

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“THE ASCENT OF MAN.”

A REVIEW.

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SIR,—I should like, with your permission, to make some observations upon that remarkable book, Professor Drummond's “Ascent of Man.” It is destined to make a strong impression upon public opinion, especially on the unformed mind of youth; and I much fear that its tendency will be to reinforce that stream of materialism which is flowing so strongly at present. Let me say at the outset that the argument for Evolution was never stated in a more fascinating manner; seldom has the gift of language been used with greater skill; and the danger is lest the reader, captivated by the charm of the style and the ingenuity of the argument, should fail to see how deep are the wounds inflicted on Revealed Religion.

I propose to criticise the book from the side of Biblical doctrine, and to ask how it stands to those truths which lie at the foundation of the Christian faith.

Professor Drummond claims to give a history of man from the side of science; and to answer the question, Whence and how came he to be here? He sees no evidence of direct creation by God; but holds that man, like everything else in the universe, is the product of gradual development through countless ages. Go far enough back to the rudimentary forms of animal life, and the progenitor of man is discovered among the “ascidians” or “molluscs.” From this initial stage an ascending series of animal forms is evolved, ending in the “mammalia”; and out of this latest order

SOME APE-LIKE ANIMAL

is the ancestor of the savage; and, after countless years the savage is developed into the civilized man. Every stage of this

process is the work of a Power which is sometimes called "Nature" and sometimes "Evolution"; its tendency is to develop ever higher and higher forms of life. Man, according to this theory, must be always progressing towards a higher goal; though the book is silent as to whether another stage of life awaits him beyond the grave. This is a very brief abstract of a many-sided argument, which it is impossible to epitomize with absolute accuracy; but it represents, I hope with fairness, the general scope of the book.

Now, the first thing that strikes a Christian believer is the complete contradiction between the scheme of life here set forth and the teaching of Holy Scripture. According to it, man is the direct creation of God: "God created man in his own image; in the image of God created He him: male and female created He them" (Gen. i. 27). He falls from his state of innocency, and Sin and Death enter the world; and the whole scheme of Christian doctrine is reared on this foundation. It is not, as some assume it to be, merely the primitive traditions of an un-historical age; but it is the basis of the teaching of Christ and his apostles: "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. v. 12). Our blessed Lord Himself, in expounding the marriage laws, said: "From the beginning of the creation God made them male and female; for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh" (Mark x. 6-8). The whole scheme of Redemption is founded on the fact that man is a fallen and dying creature, but capable of being restored to that image of God from which he fell. "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. xv. 21, 22). Nothing is more striking in Scripture than the absolute distinction drawn between man and the lower animals: man alone is under law to God; man alone is a sinner, and needs a Saviour; man alone is worthy of being redeemed from death and hell, and of enjoying "everlasting life." The Bible has been well said "to breathe the atmosphere of eternity," and man alone is able to inhale that atmosphere; he is the only creature capable of "looking before and after." An impassable gulf separates him from the wisest elephant, or ape, or dog; none of these can be made to "know

God”; none of them has a soul in the spiritual sense of the term; of no other creature can it be said, “What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”

We search Professor Drummond’s book in vain to find this root principle; at no period in “man’s ascent” do we reach the time when he was made in God’s image and likeness. We catch sight of man in the transition state between the ape and the savage; and his first moral perceptions spring from the budding of

MATERNAL LOVE IN THE SAVAGE MOTHER.

It is not easy to see where responsibility to God comes in. Apparently, in the earlier stages of man, he murders his rival with as little guilt as a lion seizes his prey; he knows nothing of the primeval law, “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made He man” (Gen. ix. 6). We ask, Where was Sin then? We may ask further, Can there be any such thing as “Sin,” in the Bible sense, under this theory of man’s origin?

Again we ask, Is such a theory consistent with the “living God” of the Bible? Is it consistent with the God “who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter iii. 9)? Is it consistent with a God “who is angry with the wicked every day”; but “who taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in his mercy”? Does not the teaching of this book, like the writings of Darwin, Huxley, and Tyndall, tend to expel the “supernatural” from the universe? Does it not conceive of God as a remote intelligence, unconcerned with individual man? or, as Matthew Arnold described Him, “a stream of tendency that makes for righteousness”? Can any vital religion be founded on such a basis? Will men love, honour, and obey such a dim, impersonal Being? Will they struggle to overcome the desperate temptations of “the world, the flesh, and the devil,” so that they “may give a good account to Him who is ready to judge the quick and the dead”? I wot not. All human history shows that nothing but belief in “the living God” will powerfully affect the heart and conscience of man: it is those who believe that “God hath spoken” who will hearken to his voice. I assert that there never has been, and never will be, a religion which will grapple with

man's conscience except one that is founded upon "Thus saith the Lord." Men will not go to the stake for Evolution; men will not "deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Christ," for an Intelligence scarcely separable from Nature. Stephen, when stoned to death, was sustained by the vision of "Jesus standing at the right hand of God." Would he have yielded his life for Evolution? Would the martyrs whom Nero smeared with pitch, and lighted as torches in the streets of Rome, have faced death in the hope that a better era would dawn after millenniums had passed, and that some future generation of men would live higher lives on this earth? No: experience has abundantly proved that apostles and prophets, saints and martyrs, cannot be manufactured by fine phrases about the evolution of humanity; but they can be "evolved" through faith in the living God, and the sure and certain hope of

"A BETTER RESURRECTION."

This book is one of a class with which we are very familiar nowadays. It retains Christian phraseology to cover non-Christian thought; it objects to the supernatural on the ground that it reduces the Divine Being to the "God of gaps"; it confines his prerogative to the silent, noiseless evolution of law—everything has to be "evolved" out of the original "fire-mist" up to the brain of Plato and Aristotle, and the faith of Abraham and Paul. No room is left for the miraculous birth, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ; or for the Gospel which is founded on those truths; or for the promise of everlasting life in "new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

According to this writer, Christianity and Evolution are but two names for the same thing: "Up to this time no word has been spoken to reconcile Christianity with Evolution, or Evolution with Christianity. And why? Because the two are one. What is Evolution? A method of creation. What is its object? To make more perfect living beings. What is Christianity? A method of creation. What is its object? To make more perfect living beings. Through what does Evolution work? Through love. Evolution and Christianity have the same author, the same end, the same spirit."

Now, I admit that there is a kind of evolution contained in

Christianity; but is it the Evolution of Professor Drummond? The Word of God plainly teaches that God has a plan and a purpose which takes ages for their fulfilment. The plan is expressed in these words:—“After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor. i. 21); “for the preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. i. 18). That is

GOD’S “PLAN OF SALVATION.”

His purpose is expressed in the following words:—“That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him” (Eph. i. 10).

But this is a very different kind of evolution from that sketched in the “Ascent of Man”; if this Scriptural evolution is shadowed forth in the vague sentences at the end of the book it much needs further elucidation. The Christian world wishes to know whether the “Word of God” or the “wisdom of man” is to decide what God’s method of evolution is: whether its final end is a higher animal to walk this earth, or a great multitude of redeemed ones “who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Is man destined to be a citizen of earth or heaven? Shall “this corruptible put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality”? These are the questions that agitate the soul of man; compared with these it is a trifle by what steps he has been brought to this stage of his earthly journey. Professor Drummond’s book is silent on this transcendent theme, unless the following enigmatical utterance, which closes the volume, be taken as an answer to it: “Evolution always attains, always rounds off its work. It spent an eternity over the earth, but finished it. It struggled for millenniums to bring the vegetable kingdom up to the flowering plants, and attained. In the animal kingdom it never paused until the possibilities of organization were exhausted in the mammalia. Kindled by this past, man may surely say, ‘I shall arrive.’ The succession cannot break. The further evolution must go on, the higher

kingdom come—first the blade, where we are to-day; then the ear, where we shall be to-morrow; then the full corn in the ear, which awaits our children's children, and which we live to hasten."

Surely one may well ask with surprise, Is this all the light that Professor Drummond can cast on human destiny? Had Christ preached this doctrine, would multitudes of sinners have followed Him, listening to "the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God"? Would "the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind" have crowded round the Great Physician? And could He have truly said, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John viii. 12)?

I should like now to examine, in the light of history as well as of Scripture, the main thesis of Professor Drummond's book, that Evolution is steadily carrying mankind and all things in the universe towards a higher goal; its key-note, he tells us, is "perfectness"; and lest I should misrepresent him, I quote two important passages (p. 435):—"For all things are rising, all worlds, all planets, all stars, all suns. An ascending energy is in the universe, and the whole moves on with one mighty idea and anticipation. The aspiration in the human mind and heart is but the evolutionary tendency of the universe becoming conscious." . . . "Evolution is less a doctrine than a light; it is a light revealing in the chaos of the past a perfect and growing order, giving meaning even to the confusions of the present, discovering through all the deviousness around us the paths of progress, and flashing its rays already upon a coming goal. Men begin to see an undeviating ethical purpose in this material world, a tide, that from eternity has never turned, making for perfectness."

This is a very lovely picture: how far is it true?

We have a tolerably accurate record of human history for about 3,000 years. We know something of the rise and fall of the Assyrian and Chaldean Empires; of the Egypt of the Pharaohs; of ancient China and India; and, coming to later periods, we have accurate and reliable history of ancient Greece and Rome. Do we see in this long stretch of human history the constant ascending process? I think not. We see a succession

of advances followed by reactions; we see successive civilizations swept away by waves of barbarism; we see nothing permanent, and no solid basis for progress, except so far as real living faith in God has purified national life. Ancient Egypt, ancient Assyria, ancient Chaldea fell because they became corrupt. The ruins of Nineveh, Babylon, and Thebes tell of a higher civilization 3,000 years ago than now exists there. The China of Confucius, the Persia of Zoroaster, the India of Sakya-Muni, had a higher life than they possess to-day. No one doubts that the Greece of Æschylus and Sophocles, of Marathon and Platea was better than that corrupt and decayed nationality which fell an easy prey to the Romans. The Sophists, who disputed with Paul on Mars Hill, were pigmies compared with Plato and Socrates. In the same way, the Rome of Cato and the Scipios was a purer and a nobler state than the Rome of Nero and Tiberius. Never did humanity sink lower than in the times of the twelve Cæsars, when Rome was undisputed mistress of the world. The worst pessimists are Tacitus and Juvenal, who are but echoes of the first chapter of Romans.

Is not the ethical history of ancient civilization epitomized in these words: “Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” (Rom. i. 28)? Is the root principle of modern civilization in any wise different? I think not. It contains no principle of perpetuity apart from living faith in a holy God: when this declines, all that is good declines as well. The Paris of Robespierre, the France of Zola, have the seeds of decay as surely implanted as the Rome of Caligula or the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar. If the wave of atheism and sensuality that is sweeping over France is not checked, it will as surely extinguish French civilization as it did that of ancient Rome.

All over Europe we see the same conflict waged—the forces of evil were never stronger than at the close of this nineteenth century. All the great cities of Europe and America present the spectacle of vast numbers of people as dead to God and the higher life as ever the heathen were. Whence this burst of Anarchism in modern times? Whence come the dynamiter and the assassin—such conspicuous figures of late years? Whence this desperate social bitterness which eventuated the other day in

a kind of civil war in Chicago? It came from the decline of religious faith and its inevitable consequence—lawlessness.

Does the present outlook of humanity justify the optimism of Professor Drummond? Might not just as good an argument be made in favour of the pessimistic theory? Are the British people, that most favoured race, getting better and better? Examine the literature they read to-day; is it purer or more elevating than in the times of the Puritans? Is it even as good as in the days of Sir Walter Scott, of Dickens and Thackeray? Is not the special note of this time the immense increase of unclean books and periodicals, the steady drift towards the bestial literature of modern France? Nothing but the stricter enforcement of the law against obscene publications keeps this country from sinking to the same level. Just as the reading of a nation deteriorates, so do its morals; and the London of to-day presents too many traces of the same moral decay which undermined the nations of antiquity. The fearful convulsions in the United States have drawn attention to its moral condition. I quote a true description of American civilization from one of their religious periodicals, which recently was reproduced in *The Christian* :—

It is strange that good and sensible men can look upon the state of things existing in our own country without alarm. Here is a land hid from the nations of Europe until the Art of Printing and the Reformation. God sent to it the Puritans and the Huguenots, the best seed of earth. He gave to them statesmen with wisdom to lay the foundations of the most beneficent government the world had ever seen. In climate, soil, extent of territory, wealth, increase of population, and all the elements of prosperity, it has never been equalled. Yet where are we to-day? Anarchy, lawlessness, crime, and violence, threaten our national existence. . . . The utter weakness of Congress to cope with the financial difficulties that oppress the people; the rapid increase of murders, suicides, and divorces; the wide separation between the Church and those known as labourers; the condition of the Church itself, honeycombed with infidelity and decaying with worldliness—all betoken that we are on the eve of a disastrous and destructive change, and that the conversion of this part of the world at least is the wildest dream.

To this I will only add that six thousand murders were committed in the United States during the year 1893; and lynch law reigns supreme in a large part of its territory. I ask, do the signs of the times justify the optimism of Professor Drummond?—or the darker outlook of the New Testament?

What does the Inspired Volume teach about the history

of this dispensation? Our blessed Lord says:—“As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be; for as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matt. xxiv. 38, 39). St. Paul says:—“Know also that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy” (2 Tim. iii. 1, 2). St. John says:—“All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John ii. 16, 17). The Bible clearly teaches that this dispensation will end in failure, like the previous ones. It points to a time of sore judgments, when “the vials of God’s wrath” will be poured on the earth, and after this time of judgment will come a purified earth; and these words will be fulfilled:—“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. xi. 15). So far from teaching continuous evolution from good to better, from high to higher, Scripture teaches a final catastrophe—in which all that is of the earth, earthy, shall perish; and in which only that which is “unseen and eternal” shall remain. “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

Now, I am well aware that all is not black in the modern outlook. I do not forget the outburst of faith and zeal that has marked several branches of the Christian Church in the last half century; the great increase of missionary effort; the many pious and holy lives that are led. We have two opposing currents running side by side: just as the muddy waters of the Arve run side by side with the pure waters of the Rhone; the stream of evil gets darker, the stream of good purer. But there is this difference: that whereas formerly the irreligious part of the community outwardly admitted the obligations of Christianity, now they ostentatiously ignore them; their language is, “there is no God, no heaven, no hell; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.” There are far more avowed agnostics and

atheists in Great Britain and America than there were fifty years ago. Universal human experience shows that this phenomenon coincides with national decay; it has become so striking a feature of these latter days that one is not surprised that many of the most devout souls presage the near approach of that catastrophe which Holy Scripture predicts is to end this stage of the world's history. Europe is one armed camp, containing fourteen millions of trained soldiers liable to be called out at the outbreak of war; and what with the anarchism, infidelity, and class hatreds, and national antipathies that prevail, it is easy to see that what men call an accident might cause the powder magazine to explode, and shatter modern civilization to pieces.

I conclude, therefore, that we have no warrant for the optimist views set forth in the "Ascent of Man"; but we have ample reason to believe the threatenings of God's Word, and to fix our hopes, not on this evil world, "which passeth away," but on the Kingdom of God, which endureth for ever.

But Professor Drummond may say: What are three thousand years of human history to Evolution? Its scale of measurement is millions of ages. Let modern civilization be blown to pieces—what matters it if millions of ages hence mankind "will arrive" at something better? This is not very cheering: but turn to a longer period of history—the story of the rocks. How far does it support his theories? I am no geologist; but I fancy that few geologists will deny that the fossil remains of man came last in the history of the globe; and they will also admit that the "missing link" has not yet been found between man and his ape-like progenitor. So far as I know, no fossil remains have yet revealed the "Ascent of Man" from the lower animals; the fossil skeleton of the remotest savage is *toto cælo* removed from the highest ape. We cannot lay our hands upon any trustworthy evidence of human Evolution.

Sir CHAS. LYELL, in "Principles of Geology," says:—

"Man must be regarded by the geologist as a creature of yesterday."

Professor HUXLEY, in "American Addresses," says:—

"I cannot at present find any intermediate forms which bridge over those gaps or intervals. . . . We know of no animal now living which in any sense is intermediate."

In his "Lay Sermons," 1870, page 249, HUXLEY remarked:—

"What, then, does an impartial survey of the positively ascertained truths of Palæontology testify in relation to the common doctrine of progressive

modification? . . . It negatives those doctrines; for it either shows us no evidence of any such modification, or demonstrates it to have been very slight.”

Professor DANA, the eminent geologist, in “Geology,” says:—

“No remains of fossil man bear evidence to less perfect erectness of structure than in civilized man, or to any nearer approach to the man-apes in essential characteristics. . . . Not the first link below the lowest level of existing man has yet been found. . . . If the links ever existed, their annihilation, without trace, is so extremely improbable that it may be pronounced impossible. Until some are found, Science can never assert they ever existed.”

Professor VIRCHOW, in “Freedom of Science,” says:—

“On the whole, we must really acknowledge that there is a complete absence of any fossil type of a lower stage in the development of man. Nay, if we gather together the whole sum of the fossil men hitherto known, and put them on a parallel with those of the present time, we can decidedly pronounce that there are among living men a much greater number of individuals who show a relatively inferior type than there are among fossils known up to this time.”

Lord SALISBURY, in his recent address to the British Association, says:—

“The cloud of impenetrable mystery hangs over the development and still more over the origin of life. If we strain our eyes to pierce it, with the foregone conclusion that some solution is and must be attainable, we shall only mistake for discoveries the figments of our own imagination.”

He closes his address with these remarkable words:—

“I prefer to shelter myself in this matter behind the judgment of the greatest living master of natural science among us, Lord Kelvin, and to quote as my own concluding words the striking language with which he closed his address from this chair more than twenty years ago. ‘I have always felt,’ he said, ‘that the hypothesis of natural selection does not contain the true theory of Evolution, if Evolution there has been in biology. . . . I feel profoundly convinced that the argument of design has been greatly too much lost sight of in recent zoological speculations. Overpoweringly strong proofs of intelligent and benevolent design lie around us, and if ever perplexities, whether metaphysical or scientific, turn us away from them for a time, they come back upon us with irresistible force, showing to us through nature the influence of a free will, and teaching us that all living things depend on one everlasting Creator and Ruler.’”

I think, therefore, I am justified in stating that the whole Evolution theory rests upon conjecture, and nothing but conjecture; the transmutation of species even in the animal and vegetable kingdoms is confined within narrow limits. As Professor Drummond stated in his first book, “Natural Law in the Spiritual World”: “impassable barriers mark off the provinces of Nature, as the organic and the inorganic are staked

off from each other by a boundary which cannot be crossed"; so, according to the Professor, at that time "the spiritual man" was separated by an impassable gulf from "the natural man." His language was then most emphatic. "The passage from the natural world to the spiritual world is hermetically sealed on the natural side. The door from the inorganic to the organic is shut. No mineral can open it; so the door from the natural to the supernatural is shut, and no man can open it" (p. 71). "There is no spontaneous generation in religion any more than in nature. Christ is the source of life in the spiritual world; and he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son, whatever else he may have, hath not life" (p. 74). "No exposition of the case could be more truly scientific than this, 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: *neither can he know them*, because they are spiritually discerned.'"

But a marvellous development in his views has occurred since then. According to his later book, "Evolution" has overleaped those barriers. All living things that now exist have been evolved out of original protoplasm; and I fear the distinction between the natural and the spiritual has disappeared with all other dividing lines.

I assert that all we know in the realms of fact is opposed to this theory of dreamland. Human history, so far back as it exists, knows nothing of this metamorphosis, neither does the geological record of the earth. It is a remarkable fact that after all these ages of evolution since the first savage ancestor of man appeared on the earth, we have to-day plenty of savage races scattered over the world as backward as in the earliest dawn of history. The pigmies whom Stanley discovered in the vast African forest are exactly the same as described by Herodotus 2,500 years ago. How has their evolution stood still all this time? The Australian and Patagonian savage marks no advance since primeval times. One thing alone can raise him—that is, the religion of Christ. Even Darwin allowed that Christianity had turned Patagonian savages into civilized beings; and he subscribed to the end of his life to the Patagonian Mission. When Dr. Paton landed on the New Hebrides he found a brutal race of cannibals living just as their ancestors had done for thousands of years; to all appearance, if left to themselves,

“Nature” would have evolved nothing better for other thousands of years; but a “supernatural” element was introduced. The story of “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” was brought to them and preached, “with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven,” and thousands of these cannibals are now leading beautiful Christian lives. That Divine power which is now civilizing the natives of Patagonia and the New Hebrides did the same for our savage forefathers; it tamed the Goths and Vandals who swept away the rotten edifice of ancient Rome, and whatever there is good in modern Europe is due to its healing power.

I assert that no natural development accounts for these things. It was the “God of gaps,” to use Professor Drummond’s not very reverent language, who suspended the natural order at the birth of Christ, and introduced a supernatural order. All that is good in European history is due to the fact that “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

If this vision fades from an unbelieving world, the hopes of humanity will perish with it. They are not the friends of mankind who seek to belittle this glorious vision, who would remove it from the category of the supernatural to that of the natural. If Christ is not “God manifest in the flesh,” He is no Saviour for men; if He is merely the latest stage of Evolution, his religion will die out as surely as the faiths of Isis and Osiris, of Odin and Thor.

Thank God, we are left to no uncertainty on this question of questions: “We have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter i. 16). Our faith stands, “not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God”; and the time is drawing near when the whole world will acknowledge the truth that “the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

Yours faithfully,

SAMUEL SMITH.

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