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THE BIBLE AND THE EARLY HISTORY OF MANKIND

by

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ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE FALL

PREFACE

TWENTY-FIVE years ago the late Sir Bertram Windle, then President of University College, Cork, published for the help of Catholic students a book entitled *The Church and Science*. It covered the whole, or nearly the whole, ground on which revealed religion comes into contact with the natural sciences and still possesses much value. But with the lapse of a quarter of a century there are naturally many new things to be said. In the little book, now offered to English-speaking Catholics the writer has endeavoured to summarise, in the light of this additional knowledge, the present position of the discussion which surrounds the most important of the questions dealt with in *The Church and Science*, viz., the origin of man, and his early history. But an attempt has also been made to bring the data furnished by science into relation with the Book of Genesis, a task which lay outside Sir Bertram Windle's scope. The writer is a Catholic priest addressing himself to Catholics, interested in the relations between theology and those branches of science which concern themselves with these problems. Every effort has been made to give due weight to all relevant pronouncements of ecclesiastical authority. If the present work were addressed to non-Catholics a different line of argument would naturally have been followed. The author would have tried to show the credibility of the doctrine of original sin on merely human grounds and the impossibility of mind having been a product of matter. Appeals to the authority of the 'Pontifical Biblical Commission', which could have had no meaning for those outside the Church, would have been avoided. Several paragraphs of the section on 'Science and the Origin of Man' are reproduced with slight verbal

alteration from articles contributed by the writer to the *Dublin Review* : *The Problem of Neanderthal Man* (April, 1928) ; *The Fossil Man of Peking* (April, 1932) ; *The Origin of Man in the Light of Recent Research* (July, 1934) and *Prehistory and the Fall of Man* (October, 1938).

HUMPHREY J. T. JOHNSON.

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THE SOURCE OF MODERN DIFFICULTIES

VERY few persons claiming the name of Christian would assert that Christianity could be entirely divorced from history. Some, it is true, have maintained that it can be separated even from belief in the historical existence of Our Lord ; but such are only a negligible minority. In its traditional form Christianity has presupposed the historical character, not only of the New Testament, but of the Old Testament as well, though enlightened Catholics now recognise that the mode of writing employed by the ancient Hebrew historians differed in many respects from that in use to-day. This attitude survived the Reformation. It no more occurred to the Protestant reformer than to the mediæval schoolman that a man who disbelieved the Bible was a fit person to exercise the Christian ministry. The first shock was experienced when the Copernican system proved inconsistent with the current interpretation of a passage in the Book of Josue. Galileo was to stand in relation to Darwin as did Wyclif to Luther. More than two centuries after the condemnation of the Tuscan astronomer Newman noted ' a perplexity and scandal on the part of the religious portion of the community in consequence of a renewed collision between scientific men and believers in Revelation.' In former times, he continued, astronomy had been the chief stumbling-block ; now it was geology, ethnology, and philology. The situation is no longer what it was eighty years ago. The most conservative theologian accepts modern geology and ethnology, to-day more generally spoken of as anthropology, has ceased to trouble a generation of Protestants whose views on original sin are in a state of flux. But Catholic university students and schoolteachers are still perplexed at the hesitation shown by theologians in accepting positions taken as axiomatic in the world of science. The manuals of Scripture and dogmatic theology used in seminaries are often of a kind hardly calculated to equip

students for the priesthood with an adequate appreciation of these problems. For they are apt to either ignore difficulties or offer but obsolete 'solutions' of them. In addition to those within the fold there are to be met with educated men and women, otherwise favourably disposed towards Catholicism, who yet hesitate to embrace it out of fear that the Church is committed to positions which are no longer tenable. Besides those capable of formulating difficulties in their own minds, there is a considerable body of semi-educated opinion, vaguely uneasy that all is not well as regards the relations of faith and science. It is probable that in practice the extent to which these difficulties are felt is somewhat limited by the fact that there is little reading of the Old Testament on the part of the Catholic laity. It is regrettable that so much of the light shed on the New Testament by the messianic passages of the Old is thus lost ; but it can be fairly urged that indiscriminate reading of the earlier historical books of the Old Testament, except by those possessing some knowledge of the Ancient East, may raise in the mind perplexities not easily resolved. For all literature (and inspired literature is no exception to this rule) bears of necessity the stamp of the age in which it was written, and its interpretation must be largely sought through a study of that age. It was the recognition of this fact which led the French Dominican fathers to found a school of biblical studies on the site of the old crusading church of St. Stephen in Jerusalem. For they saw that in a land where social conditions had changed comparatively little since biblical times, the Bible would yield up its secrets more readily than to a Roman theologian on the one hand or a Protestant professor at Oxford or Göttingen on the other.

The degree of critical intelligence with which we read the Bible does not necessarily bear any relation to the amount of spiritual profit we derive from it, as the latter depends on our inward dispositions. A scholarly Jew will understand much in the Gospels which a simple Catholic will not. But a Catholic conversant with the age in which the inspired literature took its shape, can obtain a wider view of the scope of God's Providence than one who lacks this knowledge.

The Old Testament brings us into contact not with one civilization like the New, but with many. The books of Maccabees have for their background the Hellenistic world ; Esdras and Nehemias, the Persian one. In the books of Kings we come under the shadow of the great Assyrian Empire ; in Exodus we are in contact with the Egypt of the Pharaohs. But of all the books of the Bible there is probably none for the understanding of which so much extraneous knowledge is needed as Genesis, and for this reason it is the one least adapted for teaching in schools : yet from the point of view of dogma it is the most important of the books of the Old Testament ; since the doctrine of Christ's redeeming mission is inseparably linked with that of the Fall. The book of Genesis stands, moreover, in relation to the rest of the Old Testament, as does the Old Testament itself with regard to the New. As the Old Testament forms an introduction to the history of the establishment of the Christian Dispensation, so Genesis serves as an introduction to the establishment of the Mosaic one. It was about a century ago that the first book of the Bible became the centre of controversy. Students of the earth's crust were demanding a far longer time for its formation than that allowed by the generally received interpretation of the sacred text. A conflict, as acute as that which occurred at the time of Galileo, was not, however, repeated. For a bridge was found between the rival positions in the hypothesis of successive creations and catastrophes.

It was otherwise when the theory of Évolution began to gain ground ; though even here, had the problem of man's origin been excluded from it, the conflict would have been less embittered. Bishop Gore said that, if the evolutionary theory had been propounded in the 4th century instead of the 19th, it would have encountered less hostility on the part of Christian theologians, and this is probably true. For its propagation synchronized with attacks on Christianity and Catholicism directed from other quarters. A destructive form of biblical criticism was making headway ; Positivism was announcing its intention to erect an autonomous morality on the ruins of theology and anti-clericalism was attacking the spiritual authority of the Pope under cover of attacking

the temporal power. The evolutionary hypothesis was used as an ally of anti-Christian and even anti-theistic philosophy. For it was plausibly interpreted as eliminating the necessity for a first cause. Had it not been so used, the opposition to it would have been less. But still it was sincerely regarded by nearly all Catholics and by most Protestants as incompatible with the letter of Holy Writ. It was often this last consideration which determined the attitude of Catholics; for the theory, when divorced from materialistic associations, was admittedly not contrary to any dogmatic definition of the Church.

Another obstacle which Evolution had to encounter was the traditional theological dislike of 'novelty,' a distrust wholesome enough within proper limits, but when improperly applied, tending to close the mind to the force of evidence. Newman, as far back as 1862, held that in view of the morphological similarity between men and apes, the *onus probandi* rested on those who denied rather than on those who affirmed the existence of a genetic connexion between them. But in this, as in other matters, he was ahead of his time. For persistent efforts were made by Catholics for many years to whittle away the growing body of palæontological evidence for the evolution of the human body from lower forms of life. Those who took this line exhibited a temper of mind similar to that of persons who, having disproved the occurrence of some alleged ecclesiastical miracles, claim to have invalidated the evidence for all. But their task was made easier by the errors into which over-enthusiastic evolutionists were sometimes carried. Not all Catholics were, of course, obscurantists; but obscurantism was the order of the day.

During the last twenty years a change of feeling has come about, made easier by the less aggressive tone adopted by men of science and the impossibility of disproving the existence of palæolithic man. But obscurantism is not dead, and only a few years ago I heard a well-known Roman theologian say that as the Bible gave us a record of history from the time of Adam onwards, it was wrong to admit that there was such a person as prehistoric man.

Much trouble has arisen in consequence of theologians,

being so preoccupied with the *scandalum pusillorum*, that they have neglected to avoid the *scandalum eruditorum*. Yet when they play into the hands of rationalism, they indirectly bring about the evil they so much wish to avoid. For what the learned hold to-day, the populace will hold to-morrow.

A more formidable difficulty than that arising in connexion with the origin of man is that presented by the Fall, and this last question now forms the most difficult problem in the whole range of Catholic apologetics. Although there are some problems connected with it, for whose solution we may perhaps have to wait for many years, it is well in the meantime to take stock of the situation, and without, on the one hand, belittling new knowledge or, on the other, abandoning any point of defined doctrine to seek the lines along which solutions may be one day found.

II

SCIENCE AND THE ORIGIN OF MAN

ZOOLOGISTS tell us that man belongs to the order *Primates* of the group *Eutheria* of the class *Mammalia* of the great sub-kingdom of the Vertebrates. The inclusion of man in one order with the apes and lemurs, or *Prosimiæ*, dates from the time of Linnæus, who also included the bat among the *Primates*. Some of the older naturalists separated man from the apes or *Quadrumana* and included him in a separate order, that of the *Bimana*, on the ground that we cannot bring our great toes into contact with our little ones as we can bring our thumbs and little fingers together. But modern authorities do not, as a rule, consider that man's lack of a prehensile foot is of such moment as to justify his being placed in a separate order from the apes.

Flower and Lydekker recognize two sub-orders of *Primates*, the *Anthropoidea* including man and the apes, and the *Lemuroidea*. Of the *Anthropoidea*, other than man, there exist four or five families: the *Hapalidæ* or marmosets; the *Cebidæ* or flat-nosed apes of the New World, other than marmosets; the *Cercopithecidæ* or long-tailed apes of the Old World and the great apes. Of these last there exist four or

five families, according as whether the gibbon (*Hylobates*) is included among the *Simiidae* or treated as constituting a separate family. Of the large apes the gorilla and the chimpanzee are natives of Tropical Africa, the latter occupying a wider area than the former, and being met with as far west as the Gold Coast. Of the Asiatic members of the family the orang-utan is now confined to the islands of Sumatra and Borneo, while the gibbon is found also on the Asiatic mainland and in the island of Java. No anthropomorphous apes now survive in India; but in Miocene times North India was a great breeding ground for them. In Europe there exist, out of captivity, no Primates, other than man, save the semi-wild apes inhabiting the summit of the Rock of Gibraltar. From the standpoint of comparative morphology man resembles the *Simiidae* more closely than any of the other families. Compared with all the apes, however, in him the cranial portion of the skull exceeds the facial proportion to a greater degree. The arm of the gorilla is one-sixth longer than his spine; the human arm is one-fifth less. The proportions of the human thorax differ also from those of the simian. In the lower apes the thorax is usually deeper than wide; in the higher apes it is wider than deep, but less so than in man.

The classification of man by morphological criteria does not, of course, take mental characters into account. Were they included, man would have to be placed not only in a different order from the apes, but in a different kingdom as well. For in this respect there is a wider difference between a man and a gorilla than between a gorilla and a daisy. The one is as incapable of creating civilization as the other. Structural resemblances between men and apes were noted by the ancients. The Barbary ape or baboon which scrambled in droves over the barren rocks of North Africa was a familiar sight in the Græco-Roman world. One species, *Papio anubis*, was tamed by the ancient Egyptians. It is possible that some knowledge of the chimpanzee filtered down the valley of the Nile from the dark lands which lay to the south of the cataracts, and it may be that the Carthaginian sailor, Hanno, heard of the gorilla during the voyage of exploration to the West coast of Africa,

on which he appears to have penetrated as far as Cape Palmas.

The great apes of the Malay region became known to Europeans during the 17th century, as did the smaller African anthropoid about the same time, though the existence of the gorilla was only established by the explorer du Chaillu in the 19th century.

When John Ray, the 'father of English Natural History,' published his descriptive work on mammals and reptiles in 1693 he omitted man from his list. English thought was then cast in so strongly theological a mould, that it might have been regarded as impious to have included him, though Ray cautiously noted anatomical similarities between human and simian teeth. Six years later the foundations of the science of physical anthropology were laid when Dr. Edward Tyson published a monograph on the anatomy of a chimpanzee, which however he miscalled an orang-utan, as the sea-captains of the period confused the two animals. Tyson's work, which appeared with a pedantic dedication to Somers, the Lord Chancellor, contained no hint of the idea of Evolution, nor was such to be heard of till long afterwards.

But the naturalistic 18th century was not opposed to the inclusion of man within the animal kingdom and Linnæus broke with tradition by placing him in the order of Primates in the 10th edition of his *Systema Naturae* in 1758. Even now there was no suggestion of a genetic connexion between men and other animals and Linnæus recognized the special character of *homo* by according to him the description *sapiens*. But when once a classification of the animal kingdom, based on anatomical principles, came into being, that tendency of the human mind which makes it suspect that resemblances betoken community of origin rendered the emergence of the hypothesis of Evolution inevitable. The learned Scottish judge, James Burnett, Lord Monboddo, aroused the scorn or laughter of his contemporaries by arguing that man had originally been a quadruped and was at one time an animal like the 'orang-utan' as he also misnamed the chimpanzee. (*Antient Metaphysics*, Vol. IV, Book I, p. 26. Edinburgh, 1795.)

Two generations later, when Comtism was impregnating the social atmosphere, Evolution met with a more deferential reception. When the *Origin of Species* appeared Huxley wrote: 'Old ladies of both sexes consider it a decidedly dangerous book,' but he added: 'Every philosophical thinker hails it as a veritable Whitworth gun in the army of liberalism,' in other words as a new nail in the coffin of dogmatic religion. The *Origin of Species* was published in the year in which the temporal power of the Pope began to crumble and Huxley himself noted that the 'species question' divided 'the attention of general society' with Italy and the volunteer movement called into being by supposed aggressive intentions towards this country on the part of Louis Napoleon. The *Descent of Man* synchronized with the Italian occupation of Rome and the bearing of this coincidence on the Catholic attitude towards Evolution should not be forgotten. For both events appeared to be but different aspects of a movement inimical to revealed religion, though it is fair to add that in their opposition to it, Darwin's disciples went further than Darwin himself. That Catholics must have opposed Evolution in its materialistic form is obvious. What is less so is why they should have opposed, sometimes with scarcely less vehemence, the modified form of it advocated by Mivart, Wallace, and de Quatrefuges in which the spiritual part of man was excluded from its operation. Mivart's views were not, indeed, condemned by Rome and he was awarded a doctorate of philosophy by Pius IX; but nevertheless they were strongly discouraged. The reason for Rome's attitude is not inexplicable. Mivart's view of man's origin preserved alike God's creative agency and man's spiritual nature; therefore it was not condemned. But on the other hand, it was, on account of its novelty, disturbing not only to uneducated and semi-educated Catholics, but also to those educated ones who were deficient in mental elasticity, besides being contrary to the received interpretation of Scripture. The Church prudently awaited events.

A theory had been put forward to explain the resemblances between men, apes, and monkeys and it was being treated by many men of science, as well as by publicists, as

the basis of a new philosophy which was to supersede Christianity. Opponents of the theory for the most part blindly denounced it without seriously weighing what was to be said in its favour. They were on firmer ground, when they argued that the then silent state of the palæontological record afforded some ground for suspension of judgment. Darwin was, however, justified in pointing out that the absence of fossil remains substantiating his theory should not be given over-much weight on the ground that 'those regions which are most likely to afford remains connecting man with some extinct ape-like creature have not yet been searched by geologists.' (*Descent of Man*, 1871, i, 201.) Since the *Descent of Man* was written the evolutionary hypothesis, as applied to the human body, has been overwhelmingly strengthened by the discovery of fossils bridging the gulf between the human and the simian form. Early in the last century what was known as 'cave-hunting' became a fashionable pursuit. Its devotees were in search not of fossil man, who was not then thought to have existed, but of fossil animals. Yet two noted 'cave-hunters,' Dr. William Buckland, Reader in Geology at the University of Oxford, and Professor Schmerling of Liège, made by accident the first discoveries of fossil man. The one was searching for the bones of extinct mammals in the limestone cliffs which overhang the pretty valley of the Meuse, the other in South Wales. The human fossils on which they stumbled were those of men of the late palæolithic age, men like those living to-day. In 1848 a skull differing from the modern type and possessing certain primitive traits was found in the Forbes Quarry on the north face of the Rock of Gibraltar by Lieutenant Flint of the Royal Artillery, who was secretary to the Gibraltar Scientific Society. After a paper on it had been read to that body, the skull was placed in a cupboard where it remained forgotten for many years.

At the time when Huxley published his essays on *Man's Place in Nature* there was generally known to the scientific world only one human fossil likely to illuminate the discussion. In 1857 a human skeleton of Pleistocene date had been discovered in a limestone cave in the Neanderthal between Düsseldorf and Elberfeld. A monograph on it

appeared the following year from the pen of Professor Schaffhausen of Bonn. Huxley at once recognized the great antiquity of the Neanderthal remains ; while their primitive features could be denied by none. Of the skull, he wrote in his essay, *On Some Fossil Remains of Man* : ' Under whatever aspect we view this cranium . . . we meet with ape-like characters stamping it as the most pithecoïd of human crania yet discovered.' Yet, taking into account the brain-mass of the Neanderthal man and also his limb-bones, Huxley expressed his conviction that he was confronted only with an extreme variety of *Homo sapiens*. ' In no sense (ran his verdict) can the Neanderthal bones be regarded as the remains of a human being intermediate between men and apes. At most they demonstrate the existence of a man whose skull may be said to revert somewhat towards the pithecoïd type.'

A contrary opinion was maintained by Professor William King of Queen's College, Galway, who considered the Neanderthal cranium so pithecoïd as ' to doubt the propriety of generically placing it with man. . . .' (Keith, *Antiquity of Man*, 1st Ed., 130.)

In 1886 the discovery in the Grotto of Spy in the Valley of the Meuse of two typically Neanderthal skeletons placed beyond doubt that the characters of the original Neanderthal skull were not to be ascribed to any pathological abnormality, but that its owner was the representative of a distinct though vanished type of Pleistocene man. Meanwhile the Gibraltar skull had found its way to the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons. Though it was examined by the leading authorities of the day its affinities to the Neanderthal skull were not at first recognized. It was later, however, seen to possess many typical Neanderthal features, though others are lacking. The lower jaw was not found ; but the upper one does not project in the typical Neanderthal manner. The brain, moreover, is smaller than in other known skulls of this type. This may perhaps be explained by the Gibraltar skull being probably female in sex.

The conclusion that a new type of man must now be recognized was reinforced by further discoveries at Krapina in Croatia made in 1899 and by others in France during the