

## CHAPTER VII.

### *THE ANTIQUITY OF MAN AND PREHISTORIC ARCHÆOLOGY.*

#### I. THE THUNDER-STONES.

WHILE the view of chronology based upon the literal acceptance of Scripture texts was thus shaken by researches in Egypt, another line of observation and thought was slowly developed, even more fatal to the theological view.

From a very early period there had been dug from the earth, in various parts of the world, strangely shaped masses of stone, some rudely chipped, some polished: in ancient times the larger of these were very often considered as thunderbolts, the smaller as arrows, and all of them as weapons which had been hurled by the gods and other supernatural personages. Hence a sort of sacredness attached to them. In Chaldea, they were built into the wall of temples; in Egypt, they were strung about the necks of the dead; in India, fine specimens are to this day seen upon altars, receiving prayers and sacrifices.

Naturally these beliefs were brought into the Christian mythology and adapted to it. During the Middle Ages many of these well-wrought stones were venerated as weapons, which during the "war in heaven" had been used in driving forth Satan and his hosts; hence in the eleventh century an Emperor of the East sent to the Emperor of the West a "heaven axe"; and in the twelfth century a Bishop of Rennes asserted the value of thunder-stones as a divinely-appointed means of securing success in battle, safety on the sea, security against thunder, and immunity from unpleasant dreams. Even as late as the seventeenth century a French

ambassador brought a stone hatchet, which still exists in the museum at Nancy, as a present to the Prince-Bishop of Verdun, and claimed for it health-giving virtues.

In the last years of the sixteenth century Michael Mercati tried to prove that the "thunder-stones" were weapons or implements of early races of men; but from some cause his book was not published until the following century, when other thinkers had begun to take up the same idea, and then it had to contend with a theory far more accordant with theologic modes of reasoning in science. This was the theory of the learned Tollius, who in 1649 told the world that these chipped or smoothed stones were "generated in the sky by a fulgurous exhalation conglobed in a cloud by the circumposed humour."

But about the beginning of the eighteenth century a fact of great importance was quietly established. In the year 1715 a large pointed weapon of black flint was found in contact with the bones of an elephant, in a gravel bed near Gray's Inn Lane, in London. The world in general paid no heed to this: if the attention of theologians was called to it, they dismissed it summarily with a reference to the Deluge of Noah; but the specimen was labelled, the circumstances regarding it were recorded, and both specimen and record carefully preserved.

In 1723 Jussieu addressed the French Academy on *The Origin and Uses of Thunder-stones*. He showed that recent travellers from various parts of the world had brought a number of weapons and other implements of stone to France, and that they were essentially similar to what in Europe had been known as "thunder-stones." A year later this fact was clinched into the scientific mind of France by the Jesuit Lafitau, who published a work showing the similarity between the customs of aborigines then existing in other lands and those of the early inhabitants of Europe. So began, in these works of Jussieu and Lafitau, the science of Comparative Ethnography.

But it was at their own risk and peril that thinkers drew from these discoveries any conclusions as to the antiquity of man. Montesquieu, having ventured to hint, in an early edition of his *Persian Letters*, that the world might be much

older than had been generally supposed, was soon made to feel danger both to his book and to himself, so that in succeeding editions he suppressed the passage.

In 1730 Mahudel presented a paper to the French Academy of Inscriptions on the so-called "thunder-stones," and also presented a series of plates which showed that these were stone implements, which must have been used at an early period in human history.

In 1778 Buffon, in his *Époques de la Nature*, intimated his belief that "thunder-stones" were made by early races of men; but he did not press this view, and the reason for his reserve was obvious enough: he had already one quarrel with the theologians on his hands, which had cost him dear—public retraction and humiliation. His declaration, therefore, attracted little notice.

In the year 1800 another fact came into the minds of thinking men in England. In that year John Frere presented to the London Society of Antiquaries sundry flint implements found in the clay beds near Hoxne: that they were of human make was certain, and, in view of the undisturbed depths in which they were found, the theory was suggested that the men who made them must have lived at a very ancient geological epoch; yet even this discovery and theory passed like a troublesome dream, and soon seemed to be forgotten.

About twenty years later Dr. Buckland published a discussion of the subject, in the light of various discoveries in the drift and in caves. It received wide attention, but theology was soothed by his temporary concession that these striking relics of human handiwork, associated with the remains of various extinct animals, were proofs of the Deluge of Noah.

In 1823 Boué, of the Vienna Academy of Sciences, showed to Cuvier sundry human bones found deep in the alluvial deposits of the upper Rhine, and suggested that they were of an early geological period; this Cuvier virtually, if not explicitly, denied. Great as he was in his own field, he was not a great geologist; he, in fact, led geology astray for many years. Moreover, he lived in a time of reaction; it was the period of the restored Bourbons, of the Voltairean

King Louis XVIII, governing to please orthodoxy. Boué's discovery was, therefore, at first opposed, then enveloped in studied silence.

Cuvier evidently thought, as Voltaire had felt under similar circumstances, that "among wolves one must howl a little"; and his leading disciple, Élie de Beaumont, who succeeded him in the sway over geological science in France, was even more opposed to the new view than his great master had been. Boué's discoveries were, therefore, apparently laid to rest forever.\*

In 1825 Kent's Cavern, near Torquay, was explored by the Rev. Mr. McEnery, a Roman Catholic clergyman, who seems to have been completely overawed by orthodox opinion in England and elsewhere; for, though he found human bones and implements mingled with remains of extinct animals, he kept his notes in manuscript, and they were only brought to light more than thirty years later by Mr. Vivian.

The coming of Charles X, the last of the French Bourbons, to the throne, made the orthodox pressure even greater. It was the culmination of the reactionary period—the time in France when a clerical committee, sitting at the Tuileries, took such measures as were necessary to hold in check all science that was not perfectly "safe"; the time in Austria when Kaiser Franz made his famous declaration to sundry professors, that what he wanted of them was simply to train obedient subjects, and that those who did not make this their purpose would be dismissed; the time in Germany when Nicholas of Russia and the princelings and ministers under his control, from the King of Prussia downward, put forth all their might in behalf of "scriptural science"; the time in Italy when a scientific investigator, arriving at any conclu-

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\* For the general history of early views regarding stone implements, see the first chapters in Cartailhac, *La France Préhistorique*; also Joly, *L'Homme avant les Métaux*; also Lyell, Lubbock, and Evans. For lightning-stones in China and elsewhere, see citation from a Chinese encyclopædia of 1662, in Tylor, *Early History of Mankind*, p. 209. On the universality of this belief, on the surviving use of stone implements even into civilized times, and on their manufacture to-day, see *ibid.*, chapter viii. For the treatment of Boué's discovery, see especially Mortillet, *Le Préhistorique*, Paris, 1885, p. 11. For the suppression of the passage in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, see Letter 113, cited in Schlosser's *History of the Eighteenth Century* (English translation), vol. i, p. 135.

