

CHAPTER. VIII.

THE "FALL OF MAN" AND ANTHROPOLOGY.

IN the previous chapters we have seen how science, especially within the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has thoroughly changed the intelligent thought of the world in regard to the antiquity of man upon our planet; and how the fabric built upon the chronological indications in our sacred books—first, by the early fathers of the Church, afterward by the mediæval doctors, and finally by the reformers and modern orthodox chronologists—has virtually disappeared before an entirely different view forced upon us, especially by Egyptian and Assyrian studies, as well as by geology and archæology.

In this chapter I purpose to present some outlines of the work of Anthropology, especially as assisted by Ethnology, in showing what the evolution of human civilization has been.

Here, too, the change from the old theological view based upon the letter of our sacred books to the modern scientific view based upon evidence absolutely irrefragable is complete. Here, too, we are at the beginning of a vast change in the basis and modes of thought upon man—a change even more striking than that accomplished by Copernicus and Galileo, when they substituted for a universe in which sun and planets revolved about the earth a universe in which the earth is but the merest grain or atom revolving with other worlds, larger and smaller, about the sun; and all these forming but one among innumerable systems.

Ever since the beginning of man's effective thinking upon the great problems around him, two antagonistic views have existed regarding the life of the human race upon earth.

The first of these is the belief that man was created "in the beginning" a perfect being, endowed with the highest moral and intellectual powers, but that there came a "fall," and, as its result, the entrance into the world of evil, toil, sorrow, and death.

Nothing could be more natural than such an explanation of the existence of evil, in times when men saw everywhere miracle and nowhere law. It is, under such circumstances, by far the most easy of explanations, for it is in accordance with the appearances of things: men adopted it just as naturally as they adopted the theory that the Almighty hangs up the stars as lights in the solid firmament above the earth, or hides the sun behind a mountain at night, or wheels the planets around the earth, or flings comets as "signs and wonders" to scare a wicked world, or allows evil spirits to control thunder, lightning, and storm, and to cause diseases of body and mind, or opens the "windows of heaven" to let down "the waters that be above the heavens," and thus to give rain upon the earth.

A belief, then, in a primeval period of innocence and perfection—moral, intellectual, and physical—from which men for some fault fell, is perfectly in accordance with what we should expect.

Among the earliest known records of our race we find this view taking shape in the Chaldean legends of war between the gods, and of a fall of man; both of which seemed necessary to explain the existence of evil.

In Greek mythology perhaps the best-known statement was made by Hesiod: to him it was revealed, regarding the men of the most ancient times, that they were at first "a golden race," that "as gods they were wont to live, with a life void of care, without labour and trouble; nor was wretched old age at all impending; but ever did they delight themselves out of the reach of all ills, and they died as if overcome by sleep; all blessings were theirs: of its own will the fruitful field would bear them fruit, much and ample, and they gladly used to reap the labours of their hands in quietness along with many good things, being rich in flocks and true to the blessed gods." But there came a "fall," caused by human curiosity. Pandora, the first woman created,

received a vase which, by divine command, was to remain closed; but she was tempted to open it, and troubles, sorrow, and disease escaped into the world, hope alone remaining.

So, too, in Roman mythological poetry the well-known picture by Ovid is but one among the many exhibitions of this same belief in a primeval golden age—a Saturnian cycle; one of the constantly recurring attempts, so universal and so natural in the early history of man, to account for the existence of evil, care, and toil on earth by explanatory myths and legends.

This view, growing out of the myths, legends, and theologies of earlier peoples, we also find embodied in the sacred tradition of the Jews, and especially in one of the documents which form the impressive poem beginning the books attributed to Moses. As to the Christian Church, no word of its Blessed Founder indicates that it was committed by him to this theory, or that he even thought it worthy of his attention. How, like so many other dogmas never dreamed of by Jesus of Nazareth and those who knew him best, it was developed, it does not lie within the province of this chapter to point out; nor is it worth our while to dwell upon its evolution in the early Church, in the Middle Ages, at the Reformation, and in various branches of the Protestant Church: suffice it that, though among English-speaking nations by far the most important influence in its favour has come from Milton's inspiration rather than from that of older sacred books, no doctrine has been more universally accepted, "always, everywhere, and by all," from the earliest fathers of the Church down to the present hour.

On the other hand appeared at an early period the opposite view—that mankind, instead of having fallen from a high intellectual, moral, and religious condition, has slowly risen from low and brutal beginnings. In Greece, among the philosophers contemporary with Socrates, we find Critias depicting a rise of man, from a time when he was beastlike and lawless, through a period when laws were developed, to a time when morality received enforcement from religion; but among all the statements of this theory the most noteworthy is that given by Lucretius in his great poem on *The Nature*

of Things. Despite its errors, it remains among the most remarkable examples of prophetic insight in the history of our race. The inspiration of Lucretius gave him almost miraculous glimpses of truth; his view of the development of civilization from the rudest beginnings to the height of its achievements is a wonderful growth, rooted in observation and thought, branching forth into a multitude of striking facts and fancies; and among these is the statement regarding the sequence of inventions:

"Man's earliest arms were fingers, teeth, and nails,
And stones and fragments from the branching woods;
Then copper next; and last, as latest traced,
The tyrant, iron."

Thus did the poet prophesy one of the most fruitful achievements of modern science: the discovery of that series of epochs which has been so carefully studied in our century.

Very striking, also, is the statement of Horace, though his idea is evidently derived from Lucretius. He dwells upon man's first condition on earth as low and bestial, and pictures him lurking in caves, progressing from the use of his fists and nails, first to clubs, then to arms which he had learned to forge, and, finally, to the invention of the names of things, to literature, and to laws.*

During the mediæval ages of faith this view was almost

* For the passage in Hesiod, as given, see the *Works and Days*, lines 109-120, in Banks's translation. As to Horace, see the *Satires*, i, 3, 99. As to the relation of the poetic account of the Fall in Genesis to Chaldean myths, see Smith, *Chaldean Account of Genesis*, pp. 13, 17. For a very instructive separation of the Jehovistic and Elohistic parts of Genesis, with the account of the "Fall" as given in the former, see Lenormant, *La Gènesè*, Paris, 1883, pp. 166-168; also Bacon, *Genesis of Genesis*. Of the lines of Lucretius—

"Arma antiqua, manus, ungues, dentesque fuerunt,
Et lapides, et item sylvarum fragmina rami,
Posterius ferri vis est, aerisque reperta,
Sed prior aeris erat, quam ferri cognitus usus"—

the translation given is that of Good. For a more exact prose translation, see Munro's *Lucretius*, fourth edition, which is much more careful, at least in the proof-reading, than the first edition. As regards Lucretius's prophetic insight into some of the greatest conclusions of modern science, see Munro's translation and notes, fourth edition, book v, notes ii, p. 335. On the relation of several passages in Horace to the ideas of Lucretius, see Munro as above. For the passage from Luther, see the *Table Talk*, Hazlitt's translation, p. 242.

