

## The Origin and Antiquity of Man.

BY SIR J. W. DAWSON, LL.D., F.R.S.

To the ordinary reader of the Bible, Man, in respect to his origin, appears as a direct product of the omnipotent creative will of God. His antiquity depends on the reckoning up of the genealogical lists in the Book of Genesis. But the inquiring spirit of our time has raised many questions on these subjects, some of them relating to the authority of the Bible itself, and others to matters of detail or to the connexion of the biblical statements with facts derived from other sources of information. With the first class of questions, that depending on the labours of the higher critics, we have in the present article no concern. We have to do merely with the meaning of the record as we find it, and with its relation to human history and scientific investigation.

Perhaps the first question that arises here, because that on which the principal issues depend, relates to the fact that in the opening of the Book of Genesis we have two narratives in which the origin of man is referred to, namely, the general account of the creation of the earth and its inhabitants in the first chapter, which may be regarded as the proem or introduction to the book, and the more detailed account of the origin and earliest history of man in the second chapter (vv. 4<sup>th</sup>).

The first chapter and the first three verses of the second relate to the general creation and making of the world, from that chaotic state in which it was formless and void, to the final culmination of the work in the introduction of a rational and responsible being, as the lord of the whole completed fabric. It has no note of geographical locality, except the general distinction of land and water as abodes of life, and man appears as the finishing touch of the whole, introducing the rest or sabbatism of the Creator, in which He leaves the beings created to carry out their own development and destiny, under the laws which He has enacted for them. This document presents an ordered progress in time and rank. The element of time is marked by its division into days, each with a definite beginning and end.

This is, of course, independent of the duration that we may attach to these days, which are, however, days of God and not of man, and may be distinguished from ordinary natural days, by the terms used in respect to them and by the work said to have been done in each of them. The element of grade or rank appears in the transition from dead unorganised matter to the plant and the animal in its lower and higher classes, and in the appearance of a rational and spiritual creature capable of understanding nature, and of entering into conscious individual relations with the Creator himself. Further, this preliminary cosmogony cannot be history in the ordinary sense of the term, since it relates to events antecedent to the appearance of man. If true, it must be either a revelation from God or a product of observation and inductive reasoning. We have no good reason to adopt the latter view, whereas there is an antecedent probability in favour of the former, as communicated to the earliest human beings, in order to place them in relation to the other parts of the great and complicated system in which they were placed, and which they were destined to rule and guide.

The second chapter, on the other hand, introduced by the formula, so often used in Genesis—'These are the generations of'—follows naturally on the first, as the continuation of the development of man, and his doings on the earth. Unlike the first chapter, this, with the exception of its initial statement, which recapitulates the previous notice of the creation of man, may be history; since it relates to events of which at least the first man and woman were witnesses, and respecting which these first witnesses may have transmitted information to their posterity. This is really the essential difference between these two 'documents.' In passing from the one to the other we pass from the domain of pure revelation to that of the beginnings of history properly so called.

Restricting for the present our attention to the general cosmogony, we find that man stands last and highest in the creative work, a fact confirmed

and illustrated by the succession of the remains of living beings preserved in the rocky layers of the earth's crust. We find, however, that his relationship to the higher of the brute animals is recognized by his incoming on the same creative day with them, and by his being governed by similar laws as to food, reproduction, and geographical extension (Gn 1<sup>22-26</sup>). On the other hand, the special position of man as the head of this lower world, and as gifted with reason and responsibility, is implied in several peculiar statements. His introduction is the subject of a unique deliberation on the part of the Creator—'Let us make man.' In regard to his higher, rational, and spiritual nature, he is in the 'image and likeness of God'; and in relation to this the great word 'created' is used respecting him, instead of that mediate 'making' implied in the waters or the earth 'bringing forth' other living creatures. In virtue of these higher gifts also, he is to have dominion over all other creatures, and to bring the earth itself into subjection to him, so that he shall be able to use it and to take advantage of its resources in a manner unknown to other animals. This is actually true even of the earliest men known to us, who, though rude and with few arts, were inventive, artistic, and lords of creation in their time. Further, it is not said of him as of other animals, that he is made 'after his kind.' In their case, groups are referred to, containing many species. In his case there is only one human species. The doctrine of the writer is the same with that afterward maintained by St. Paul at Athens, that God hath made all men of one blood (Ac 17<sup>26</sup>). Many types of structure are embodied in lower animals, one only in man, and that associated with the one and indivisible spirit of God which gives man understanding.

The importance of this connexion of man with the general cosmogony in fixing his place in time and rank in the system of nature, and in defining his relations to God on the one hand and to animals on the other, has been already referred to. It has also its bearing on that tendency to idolatry and nature-worship which, we now know from the oldest documents of Chaldæa and Egypt, too easily began to infect the human mind. In this masterly summary of the origin of nature, all the material of these ancient superstitions is grandly grasped under the wide conception of one creative will determining all things and pro-

ducing them in a definite order of development. Thus all the powers and objects of nature cease to be gods, but are under the law of the one omnipotent God and are subservient to man himself, so far as he can ascertain the laws which govern them, or the properties which they possess, and thus turn them to his own use and benefit. It may further be noted that all this was of special importance to Israel when it first became an independent nation, since, as I have elsewhere argued, the primary intention of Genesis must have been to serve as a 'campaign document,' to rouse the children of Israel in Egypt to the white heat of enthusiasm necessary to fit them for the exodus.

In passing to the continuation of our record in the second chapter of Genesis, we find ourselves on different ground, and entering on the development of man and his interests, after the cessation, at the end of the sixth day, of the proper work of creation. This is marked not only by the new heading, but by the introduction of a new name for God, 'Jehovah-Elohim.' Whatever significance literary critics may attach to this name, one thing is certain on the face of the document. When we enter on the drama of human history, leading so soon to the Fall and the promised restoration, it becomes proper to remind us that we have to do not merely with the Creator who reveals himself to us in the grandeur and complexity and beauty of His works, but with that same God in the capacity of the Covenant God, the Redeemer and Saviour, known not only by the name of Elohim, the powerful one, the object of awe, but by the dearer name of Jehovah, the Coming Saviour who is to redeem humanity from the evils brought on it by sin. Therefore the writer naturally and properly adds this new name to that by which he had designated the Creator as such on the work of the six days.

In like manner we are now introduced not merely to the human species, male and female, and commissioned to overspread the earth, but to the first individual man, and we are more explicitly informed as to his twofold animal and spiritual nature, and their distinct origins. His organism is moulded of 'dust from the ground,' in other words, the ordinary material of which other bodies are composed. These inorganic particles were themselves long ago produced by the creative power of God. They are employed in moulding the tissues and organs of man. It

was not necessary to create new material for this purpose. All the necessary elementary bodies were already in existence with all their powers and properties. So far there is mediate creation, or the utilizing of material previously produced. But there is no hint here of any elaborate and tedious evolution, whereby, by infinite minute changes, the human organism might be evolved from that of some lower creature. Why should there be? To create a single molecule of living protoplasm out of dead matter would, so far as we know or are ever likely to know, be as great a miracle of creation as to produce the countless millions of such molecules necessary to make up the organism of a complex animal. In other words, whether it pleased God to produce the man from organic particles and the woman from the side of the man, or to develop both from individual one-celled germs, the power and skill implied are substantially the same, and the changes involved are equally incomprehensible to us, except in their perceptible results. So far, however, man is of the earth earthy, and in the material of his corporeal part in no respect superior to his humbler living companions.

But the twofold nature of man is recognized here, as well as in the general account of creation. God proceeds to breathe into his nostrils the breath of life (lives), and man becomes a living soul. The expression 'living soul' is used elsewhere of lower animals, but it is not said that God breathed into them the breath of life. This 'inspiration of the Almighty,' or inbreathing of the Divine nature, is peculiar to man, and is equivalent to the image of God in the previous narrative. It gives him the godlike power of comprehending nature and communing with the Creator, and makes him a free, moral, and responsible agent (Job 32<sup>8</sup>, Jn 20<sup>22</sup>).

So far our second document does little more than recapitulate the first by way of connexion and continuation. It now enters on its special historical field by introducing us to a particular locality, and to the precise conditions or environment in which man originated. Eden seems to have been an extensive region in the great plain at the head of the Persian Gulf, watered by the Euphrates and Tigris, and by their companion streams the Kerkhar, the ancient Choaspes, and the Karun, the ancient Pasitigris. There can be no question, more especially since modern

geological research has shown that the latter river fulfils the conditions of the narrative in regard to its mineral products, that the two latter rivers are the Gihon and Pison of the writer, while the ethnic references which he gives show that his standpoint in time is in the early post-Diluvian Age, and his geographical standpoint in the vicinity of the Euphrates. It seems also evident that he was aware that the southern part of this district where the four rivers become confluent, was in the earliest human period more elevated and less swampy than in more modern times. Thus this short but seemingly most accurate geographical note brings us from the general cosmical ground of the first chapter to a definite region selected for the *début* of humanity, which it represents as containing the more important requirements for primitive human life and progress.

With reference to this specially selected region we are informed that before the creation of man it was in a bare and desolate condition, the result probably of a great submergence in pre-human times or of the Glacial Age which was passing away when man appeared; and that it was fertilized neither by rain nor artificial irrigation, but by a mist or dew that rose and watered the ground. In this fallow-land, so to speak, cleared of previous inhabitants, a garden or park was planted for man, and stocked with trees 'pleasant to the sight and good for food' and with animals suited to the pleasure and service of man, if not adequate helps meet for him. We have thus a picture of a rainless climate like that of Egypt, or one with very regular periodical rains, and a fertile soil watered by dews and by irrigation, requiring therefore some degree of intelligent attention to sustain and extend its fertility, while its climate was such as to render it habitable without clothing or artificial shelter throughout the year.

Simple though this account is, it is easy to translate it into the language of our modern physiography and physiology. So interpreted, it would read that man appeared on the re-elevation of the land from the great subsidence of the Pleistocene period, in a region prepared for him in regard to temperature and food-production, and giving him facilities for expansion, in the first place, over one of the greatest and most fertile plains in the world, and ultimately over all the habitable parts of the continents. All that we know of the conditions of the introduction of new species in

geological time, would lead us to infer that man could not have been placed in the world without such provision for his welfare, at least until by advancement in arts and invention he had become fitted to extend his range into less desirable regions. Further, as we have reason to believe that this great event occurred at the close of a time specially unfavourable to a being like man, it might have happened that geographical changes subsequent to the creation of man, would have gone on to produce ameliorations extending his Eden beyond its original limits, and removing out of his way older creatures harmful or dangerous to him. Such improvements of environment seem to have been the rule in the case of older forms of life, and *a fortiori* might have been expected in the case of the culmination of the column of animal existence.

It is true that some modern hypotheses have led certain naturalists to look for the primitive seats of humanity rather in those regions where the lowest races of men now exist; but it has been shown that this is contrary to all rational probability. And the lowest races of men are so placed geographically as to show that they are rather degraded outlying extremes than centres of introduction. Even Haeckel, the extremest of agnostic evolutionists, in his *History of Creation*, after discussing and rejecting other suggested localities of human origin, finally decides in favour of the region of the Persian Gulf, only conjecturally stretching the birthplace of man somewhat farther south over an imaginary continent in the Indian Ocean now submerged, of the probable existence of which, however, there seems to be no good evidence. Thus revelation, scientific probability, and even agnostic evolution, coincide in fixing approximately the site of the origin of man in the great Euphrates-Tigris plain, which is now also well known to have been the focus of colonization in the new departure of men and nations after the Deluge.

The biographical nature of our second record introduces us to the origin of woman as well as of man. She is moulded from a portion of the man. Such a mode of reproduction, not infrequent among lower animals, is in the case of man unique and miraculous. It is used here to enforce the closeness of the marriage tie, and is employed in this sense by Jesus Himself in His argument respecting divorce (Mk 10<sup>6</sup>). It evidently also refers to that

primeval law of marriage, still extant among some rude peoples, in which the husband leaves his father and mother and goes with his wife. Two other points appeal here incidentally. One is, that there is no hint of the base suggestion of certain modern anthropologists, now happily proved to be historically and physiologically incorrect, that there may have been ages of promiscuous intercourse before marriage was introduced. Another has reference to the attitude of the Bible to the hypothesis of gradual evolution from a Simian ancestry. If Adam was merely the latest term in a process of phylogenetic development, there must have been many females similar to him, or so near to his grade of elevation that they might have furnished a mate for him. But our record takes pains to inform us that no helpmeet could be found for him, so that he stands specifically alone. This same consideration disposes of the idea that there may have been preadamite human races still extant in the time of Adam.

In regard to the absolute antiquity of man, neither secular history, geology, nor the genealogies in Genesis enable us in the present state of knowledge to fix it with much precision. All three agree in the lateness of the advent of man in comparison with the lower animals, for the introduction of animals to Adam in the narrative in the second chapter of Genesis obviously refers only to the special fauna of Eden, and does not intimate that it was created, or migrated into the region, later than Adam. All three sources of information also agree in the reality of a diluvial catastrophe, dividing by a great physical and organic break the human period into two portions. If we adopt the most recent estimates of the time elapsed since the decadence of the Glacial period, we may limit the antiquity of the oldest known human remains to from 7000 to 10,000 years before the present time. If we accept the dates claimed by some Assyriologists for the oldest inscriptions and buildings of Babylonia, we arrive at somewhat similar conclusions, while the biblical dates as variously estimated from the Heb., Sam., and Sept. texts, scarcely carry us so far back. Our knowledge of the subject is, however, as yet too imperfect to warrant us in stating a precise date; but it is especially unwise to commit ourselves to hypotheses which would push back human origins beyond any length of time warranted either by physical or historical facts.