An Hour with the Editor

BEGINNING OF HISTORY

There are some persons, many, perhaps, who view with disapproval any attempt to fix historical dates at a period prior to 4004 B.C., the date assigned by Archbishop Usher to the creation of the world. A correspondent favors us with a letter, which we print today, in which he attempts to show that 6,037 years only have elapsed since the world was formed. As the object of this series of articles is not to engage in controversy on any subject, but only to assist persons, interested in such questions, who may not have access to histories or books of reference, it is proper to say a few words on the subject of Biblical chronology. In the first place, it may be said that the Bible does not profess to be a history of the world, and does not profess to establish any system of chronology. In the Book of Genesis and elsewhere there is a more or less definite effort to trace the genealogy of a certain family; but in reading this we have to bear in mind that we do not know what the original writer meant by the term translated "year." The year, as we understand it, is a very modern division of time. Again, there are three texts of the Scriptures, the Hebrew, the Samaritan and the Septuagint. No one can pretend to say which of these is the most reliable, and in respect to periods of time, they are hopelessly discordant. As many as three hundred different efforts have been made to establish a chronology from the Bible. They vary in the supposed date of the Creation from 3483 B.C. to 6984 B.C. Archbishop Usher in A.D. 1650 estimated 4004 as the correct number, and it has been generally adopted by publishers of the Bible when they have printed dates on the margin of the pages; but it is wholly without any authority that any one is under the slightest obligation to accept. It is, however, useful for the purposes of comparison. If we see fit to assign Creation the beginning of history to any date we may choose, we have a starting point from which subsequent dates can be fixed in relation to each other.

The desirability of fixing the time when anything occurred by reference to something that had previously occurred does not seem to have suggested itself to the historians of antiquity. They would speak of a thing as occurring in the year when a certain other event happened, and they were careful to preserve the sequence of events. The first person, so far as we know, to establish an era was Nebonassar, who achieved the brief independence of Babylon from the Assyrians. This has been fixed by astronomical calculations at 747 B. C. The Babylonians and Assyrians were, however, given to recording astronomical data in connection with events, and by reference to these it is possible with something like accuracy to trace the history of those people for more than 3,000 years before Christ, and thus we get a basis for the calculations of yet more ancient events. There are other tests to which reference will be made later. A very interesting discovery was made in Egypt in a papyrus, which mentioned the rising of Sirius, or the Dog Star, in connection with an inundation of the Nile. Calculation shows this to have taken place about 1875 B.C., and this is the earliest date that has been fixed with anything like certainty. This was in the time of what is known as the Twelfth Dynasty, and it affords a point from which reckoning can be made both backwards and forwards with some approach to accuracy.

The date of the earliest civilization in the Babylonian country is approximated by reference to the alluvial deposits formed by the Euphrates and the Tigris, and the Karun, which is a river flowing from the highlands of Persia. These rivers carry an immense quantity of silt with them, and land is forming at the head of the Persian Gulf at the rate of about 100 feet a year. The steadiness of this accumulation of silt is established historically for a period of 2,000 years. Charax, founded by Alexander the Great, was only a mile from the sea; it is now 47 miles inland. With this accumulation as a measure of time the astronomical calculations based on the Era of Nabonassar have been tested and found to tally with it, and pursuing this system of inquiry, it has been established with every likelihood of approximate accuracy, that there were civilized people living in the Mesopotamian valley between 8000 B.C. and 7000 B.C. Ur of the Chaldees, from which Abraham came, was originally situated on the sea shore. It is now 120 miles inland. If we had only one set of data from which to infer the time when events occurred in the remote past, there might be reason for declining to accept the conclusion of investigators as even approximately correct; but when we find that, calculating from a variety of data, the same, or very nearly the same conclusions are reached, we are safe in assuming them to be very nearly correct. Indeed, except during the past five or six hundred years, it is impossible to place any date in history with absolute certainty.

While speaking of the means whereby remote periods are determined, it may be well to mention how, in some cases, prehistoric dates are approximated as far as they relate to primitive man. One method is to estimate the time necessary for the formation of stalactites and stalagmites in caves. A stalactite is a deposit of carbonate of lime hanging from the roof of a cave, and formed as an icicle is formed; a stalagmite is a corresponding deposit on the floor of the cave. Water, carrying carbonate of lime in solution, trickels through the roof of the cave very slowly. As it is evaporated, it leaves the lime behind it. By watching the growths of these deposits, it is possible to come pretty close to the length of time required to form them, assuming the rate of deposit to have been uniform, as it would have to be, for the formation could not have got before the stalactites were formed, for it would then wash away the deposit. If human remains were found imbedded in stalagmites, or in places where they could not have got before the stalacttes were formed, the time when they were left there could be approximated. There are other methods of a similar nature. Perhaps it might be well to close this article on ancient dates by the following from the Scientific American:

"In February, 1909, the skull of one of our most ancient known ancestors was found at Chapelle aux Saints, in the French department of the Correze. In September a nearly complete skeleton of approximately equal antiquity was exhumed at Ferassie, in the department of Dordogne, by Dr. Capitan and M. Peyrony. The strata which covered the skeleton were absolutely intact, and the exhumation was performed so carefully that the bones were revealed in the precise positions in which they were laid to rest, at least 20,000 years ago. This is the first instance in which so ancient a skeleton, found in such well-marked and indisputable geological surroundings, has been photographed at the moment of exhumation, and before it has been disturbed.

The region surrounding Ferrassie is peculiarly rich in prehistoric human remains and documents. Ten miles eastward are the famous caves of Eyzies, where the oldest known drawings on bone, ivory and horn were discovered nearly fifty years ago. In the neighboring cave of Cro Magnon, Lartet and Christy, in 1858, discovered portions of five skeletons and two skulls, which have recently been determined to have belonged to the Aurignacian race, a less ancient race than the Neanderthal, to which the Correze skull and the Ferrassie skeleton appear to belong. The same region includes the terraces of Monstier, where chipped flint tools of peculiar character were found in 1863. The name Monsterian has been given to the period of these tools, which succeeded the acheulean and its predecessor, the chellean the most ancient division of the quaternary. Relics of the cave-dwellers have been found at various other points in the vicinity.

This region has yielded, and will continue to yield, more human documents than any other part of France, for the following reasons: During the Monsterian period of the stone age, the region was covered with prairies and forests and abounded in horses, cattle and deer, which, with the fish of the Vezere River and its tributaries, furnished a plentiful food supply. Probably reindeer could also be found on the hills. Furthermore, the river valleys are bordered by chalk cliffs and terraces, often overhanging, and honeycombed with caves, hollows and fissures, which formed excellent shelters. The deeper caves seem to have been reserved for funereal and religious uses, while savages dwelt in the shallower caves and, especially, beneath overhanging cliffs in front of which screens of boughs were constructed. A region which offered such advantages in regard to food and shelter must have been very popular in a primitive age.

On the other hand, it is certain that the general topography of the region has undergone little change since the Monsterian period. No geological convulsion has occurred. The principal change is the deepening of the valley by about thirty feet, and this has further isolated the land at the base of the cliff, which was already well protected against inundation. Men doubtless dwelt on the plains also, in those remote times, but all vestiges of them and their works have been destroyed or washed away by floods.

Finally, all bodies buried in places distant from human habitations were quickly devoured by the hyenas which then abounded in France, and during the centuries that followed, the pick and the plowshare completed the destruction of the few bones that remained. This is the explanation of the exceedingly rare occurrences of very ancient human bones in most regions and their comparative abundance in Dordogne.

The Ferrassie skeleton was discovered in the course of exploring a mass of debris about 100 feet long, sloping upward from the road to a low chalk cliff rising a few yards above it. The width of the mass varied from 30 to 60 feet and its height, at the cliff, from 15 to 30 feet. The appearance of the superficial layer and the fissures of the cliff indicated the fall of an overhanging cliff, which should have formed an extensive shelter at a much earlier epoch. As this view was confirmed by the discovery of chipped flints where the edge of the mass was cut by the road, explorations were undertaken several years ago, but nothing of especial importance was unearthed until recently. The excavation was begun by digging a broad trench from the road to the cliff in order to allow a mass to be removed in successive horizontal layers. Last September two bones were seen slightly projecting from the wall of the trench, near the bottom. On removing a little earth the bones were rcognized as a human tibia and femur. The earth over the bones was then removed, by horizontal layers, with extreme caution. When the greater part of the Monsterian stratum had been removed, three flat stones, about eight inches square, covering the skull and parts of the arms were discovered. The reddish brown sand which surrounded the skeleton contained many large splinters of the bones of animals which showed marks of hammering. Very slowly and with infinite precaution the skeleton was laid bare, without displacing a single bone. It lay on its back, with the trunk turned slightly to the left, and the legs sharply bent back under the thighs, which were half flexed on the pelvis. The knees were turned to the right. The left arm was extended beside the body, with the hand at the hip, while the right arm was bent, and the hand near the shoulder. The head was turned to the left, with the mouth wide open.

The bones, though broken in places by the great weight of the earth above them, remained firm and in their normal positions. Only the bones of the right hand and foot had been displaced, and in part removed, probably by rodents or small carnivora.

The skeleton was photographed as it lay, and the leg and arm bones were carefully removed. The pelvis was then covered with tin foil, and a large plaster cast was formed around it, so that it could be taken up without injury. The thorax and the skull were treated in the same way. Hence these parts can be mounted without the loss of a single fragment, as the earth in which they lay will surround them, inside the plaster casts, until the casts are opened in the preparing room. This method is commonly employed by palaeontologists, but this is its first application to human remains.

The age of the skeleton is indicated, with certainty, by the regularity and very characteristic appearance of the successive strata of the mass in which it was found. (Age, in prehistoric chronology, refers, not to a definite number of years, but to a period of more or less hypothetical duration.) The quaternary geological period, in which man appeared on earth, began with the comparatively warm chellean age, which has left remains of the rhinoceros, hippopotamus, and elephant, and flint tools scarcely modified by man. Then came the cold acheulean age, the age of the mammoth, marked by crudely chipped flints. The ensuing monsterian age, at first cold but subsequently mild, represents a higher civilization possessing a variety of more elaborate flint tools—daggers and picks, knives and scrapers, and disks of unknown use, very characteristic of the age. Flints of all of these types were found around and above the skeleton, while ruder acheulan flints were found beneath it. Hence the skeleton is monsterian.

The stratum containing the skeleton was covered by two strata containing flint tools of the aurignacian age. The overhanging cliff then fell, and its debris subsequently became covered by a layer of earth and stones, five feet in depth, which has effectually protected the human relics beneath.

Dr. Capitan believes that the skeleton is that of a corpse regularly prepared for sepulture, which may have been covered with earth, but was not buried in a grave. Protected by the vicinity of the living inhabitants of the shelter, the skeleton escaped the hyenas and was only nibbled by small animals. This unique skeleton, which is at least 20,000 years old, will probably be mounted and exhibited in the Museum of Natural History at Paris.

THE ENGLISH SOVEREIGNS.

II.

Henry I. was not entitled to the crown by the right of primogeniture, for he was younger than his brother Robert, Duke of Normandy, who at the time of the death of William Rufus was in the Holy Land on a crusade. The barons favored Robert as king, but Henry seized the crown, and appealed to the common people for their support, which they cheerfully gave. He exhibited his gratitude by granting a charter, which was substantially the same as Magna Charta, to which, John, years later, gave an unwilling assent. In that charter the "ancient rights and privileges" of the English people were reasserted and confirmed. The previous king had imposed levies upon the barons, according to his own sweet will, and the barons, on their part, dealt similarly with their tenants; but under the charter regular dues were established, and the barons were expressly enjoined from imposing heavy exactions upon those who held land under them. He also drew the English people to him by marrying Matilda, the daughter of King Malcolm of Scotland, and niece of Edga Atheling, one of the Saxon kings. By these means Henry aroused such an enthusiasm in his favor that when his brother landed in Portsmouth to assert his claims to the crown, and the barons were disposed to assist the invader, the English rallied round Henry's standard, and Robert was forced to abandon his claims. Henry punished the desertion of the barons by confiscating their estates, and thus the result of this invasion was the strengthening of the power of the sovereign, the lessening of the power of the great feudal lords, and the exaltation of the influence of the common people. In this we find an important step in the process of the making of England.

Henry was in all respects a remarkable man. He was handsome and accomplished, the centre of a gay court, the lord of a harem, an adventurous and gallant soldier; but more than this, he was cool, calculating, indifferent to praise or blame, fearless and without affection. He was a strong human machine, despising in others the vices which he himself indulged in. His sense of justice was keen, and his exective ability of the highest order. Of his achievements, in addition to the granting of the Charta, the establishment of the King's Court was the most far-reaching. At the head of it was the Justiciar, and associated with him were a number of selected barons. Its duty was to revise and correct laws and to act as a court of appeal. It also supervised the collection of the revenue, and as such it was called "the Court of the Exchequer," from the fact that it carried on its deliberations around a checkered table. It had the power to order the removal of all causes from inferior courts to its own, and thus was inaugurated the proceeding known as the writ of certiorari. It also established circuit courts, although at the outset these only dealt with questions involving the assessment and collection of fines, dues and taxes.

Henry had a daughter, Maud, who married the Emperor Henry V. He dying, Maud returned to England, and when Henry's son was drowned in the wreck of the White Ship, he forced the priests and nobles to swear allegiance to Maud as heir to the crown. This was a new departure in feudal times, and it was of great importance, for by it was settled forever the right of descent of the English Crown to a woman in the absence of a direct male heir. Afterwards Maud was married to the famous Count Fulk of Anjou, and she and her descendants played a very important part in English history.

The King died in 1135. His reign was certainly of vast benefit to the people of England. Himself a lover of peace, he was frequently forced to engage in war, but he emerged from all his campaigns with credit. The spirit in which he was regarded by those who knew him best may be judged from this passage from a letter written by the Archbishop of Rome, from beside the royal death-bed: "God give him the Peace he loved."

SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY.

There is a rapidly growing belief that whatever salvation through Christ may mean in its relation to the next world, it certainly has a more definite application to this world than has been usually conceded. One of the things which the church used to teach, and perhaps teaches now, is that we should be content with the station in which we were born, and one of the worst possible sins is ambition. This was admirable doctrine for the purposes of the few, who happened to be born on the top of the social heap, but rather hard on those who started life at the bottom. It is quite true that if every one had acted upon it, some of the most brilliant men who have sat in St. Peter's chair or worn the robes of archbishops might have lived and died unknown. As a rule, in the church as elsewhere, the doctrines we most insist upon are to be construed as applying chiefly to other people than ourselves.

Recently, to quote the Rev. F. I. Rae, M.A., "the centre of gravity of interest and urgency is being largely transferred from the intellectual to the social sphere. The change has taken place in the last twenty years. One can easily remember when the questions of absorbing interest were entirely theological. But now they are chiefly economic. The thing that presses is the cry of the great multitude of the hungry, the poor, and the distressed; and the worth of the Christian Gospel is being measured by its power to answer this cry. What we are facing is the emergence of a new social conscience. How is the church to vindicate and apply this social message of Jesus? This is one of the most pressing questions facing her at the present moment, and on the answer she will give to it will depend largely her future influence on the national life."

The writer of this extract is a clergyman of the Church of England, and he proceeds to inquire as to the duty of the church in view of the new ideals that are asserting themselves. He thinks that the weakness of the church is that "it is too much identified with one class." Formerly it was the church of the poor, he says, now it is the church of the rich and comfortable. The observations of Mr. Rae are directed primarily to the religious organization with which he is connected, and readers can for themselves say how far they apply to other denominations of Christians. He does not say so, but his reasoning suggests the coming of a time when the social application of the principles of Christianity will be regarded as the highest statesmanship.

A Century of Fiction

XIV.

(N. de Bertrand Lugrin)

Bernardin de Saint Pierre

This author produced one of the most famous stories that has ever been written, and it is on that story alone that his reputation as a man of letters rests. Most of us have read, and lost ourselves in the reading of, that delightful little tale of the young lovers Paul and Virginia. So overflowing is it with tender passion, with magical description, and charming word painting that it may be classed as a prose poem. It is full of harmonies and true to life in life's most beautiful aspects. The story was first read at the salon of Madame Necker, and met with such a cold reception that its author flung it aside, intending to burn it. He was induced to publish it, however, in 1788, and France read it just when she was on the verge of the mad excitement of the Revolution, and it touched her uneasy mind for the moment like a soothing balm. All of France read it, from the highest to the lowest, though even at that time people were beginning to question whether there was any such social distinction as high and low, and were feeling something of that spirit which possessed them later when the betrayer and the murderer and the knitting women at the foot of the guillotine felt themselves to be quite the equal of those who died to serve their king or to save their honor. The great Napoleon himself used to read this story while on his Italian campaign through wakeful nights when he needed a mental diversion. Joseph Bonaparte considered himself so much in the writers debt that he settled on Saint Pierre a pension of six thousand francs, as a "slight reward." And not only did all France feel the charm of the story, but it was translated into every civilized language, and read by the old and young of every country. Themes for dramas and pictures and statues were drawn from it, and innumerable babies named for the hero and heroine.

Saint Pierre was born at Havre in 1737. From the first he was a wayward lad, passionately fond of travel and adventure. He grew to very attractive manhood, and his handsome personality made him a conspicuous figure wherever he went, so that he never lacked friends and admirers. He studied engineering, and first went on duty at Malta, from whence he was discharged for insubordination. He next served in the Russian army and tried to interest Catherine in a scheme for colonizing Siberia. The Empress laughed at his ideas, and furious with her and with others in authority for the total lack of sympathy his plans received, he resigned from the army and returned to France. His great desire in life was to travel in new countries, and he besieged the home government with petitions asking their aid to further his desires. His importunities at last were rewarded, and he was appointed to a post in Madagascar. Once again he revolted, finding the work he was supposed to do, namely, to carry on the slave traffic, quite unsuited to his ideas of morality. But his voyage to the Isle of France was productive of his "Studies of Nature," which brought him fame, and Louis XVI. made him Buffon's successor in the Jardin des Plantes. He lost these honors during the Revolution, but Napoleon and King Joseph conferred many favors upon him. He died in 1814 at his country seat in Eragny-sur-Oise.

Paul and Virginia—Their Childhood

Paul and Virginia had neither clock, nor almanac, nor books of chronology, history or philosophy. The periods of their lives were regulated by those of nature. They knew the hours of the day by the shadows of the trees, the seasons by the times when those trees bore flowers or fruit, and the years by the number of harvests. These soothing images diffused an inexpressible charm over their conversation. "It is time to dine," Virginia would say to her family, "the shadows of the plantain tree are at the roots"; or "Night approaches, the tamarinds close their leaves." "When will you come to see us?" some of her companions in the neighborhood would inquire. "At the time of the sugar-canes," Virginia would answer. "Your visit will then be still more delightful," her young friends would reply. When she was asked what was her own age and that of Paul, "My brother," said she, "is as old as the great cocoa-tree of the fountain; and I am as old as the little cocoa-tree. The mangoes have borne fruit twelve times, and the orange trees have flowered four-and-twenty times, since I came into the world." Their lives seemed linked to the trees like those of fauns or dryads. Thus grew these children of nature. No care had troubled their peace, no intemperance had corrupted their blood, no misplaced passion had depraved their hearts. Love, innocence and piety were each day unfolding the beauty of their souls, disclosing matchless grace in their features, their attitudes and their motions. Still in the morning of life they had all its blooming freshness; and surely such in the Garden of Eden appeared our first parents, when coming from the hand of God, they first saw, approached and conversed together, like brother and sister. Virginia was gentle, modest and confiding as Eve; and Paul, like Adam, united the figure of manhood with the simplicity of a child.

In the rainy season the two families met together in the cottage and employed themselves in weaving mats of grass and baskets of bamboo. Rakes, spades and hatchets were ranged along the walls in perfect order; and near these instruments of agriculture were placed its products—sacks of rice, sheaves of corn, and baskets of plantains.

When night came they all supped together by the light of a lamp; after which Madame de la Tour or Margaret told stories of travelers lost during the night in forests of Europe infested by banditti; or of some shipwrecked vessel, thrown by the tempest upon the rocks of a desert island. To these recitals their children listened with eager sensibility, and earnestly begged that heaven would grant they might one day have the joy of showing their hospitality towards such unfortunates. At length the two families would separate and retire to rest, impatient to meet again the next morning. Sometimes they were lulled to rest by the beating rain which fell in torrents upon the roofs of their cottages; and sometimes by the hollow winds, which brought to their ear the distant murmur of the waves breaking upon the shore. They blessed God for their own safety, of which their feeling became stronger from the idea of remote danger.

TROUBLE ENOUGH

Robert W. Chambers, the novelist, often tells at the Century, in New York, his "trouble" story.

"A lady"—so Mr. Chambers always begins—"a lady, on the way back from her husband's funeral, stopped with her supporters at a house of refreshment.

"Gin was chosen as the beverage best suited to the occasion, and a liberal quantity of the transparent fluid was poured into the bereaved lady's glass.

"'Any water, Min?' one of the other ladies asked her, holding out the pitcher.

"But she did not deign to lift her face from her handkerchief.

"'Water?' she sobbed. 'Water? Good heavens, ain't I got trouble enough as it is?'"