

The Origin of the World

By R. McMillan.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER.

AFTER the words of the great Sir Ray Lankester, I feel that anything I can say is feeble and unnecessary. He tells you how the history of man began far back in the life of the globe, and how man developed from the low, bestial cave-dweller to the god-like creature of today. That is what gives us hope for the future. The whole life of the globe has been one long, slow, painful climb, from slime-speck to philosopher, from a protoplasmic globule to an intellectual giant.

We have all been deceived by the human tendency to think that past days were better than the present. The old man looks back to the days of his childhood, and he thinks that the world was better when he was young than it is now. He thinks that the men of his boyhood were stronger and braver and nobler than the men of today, and he talks about the "good old times." Old men have been the world's historians, and they have so glorified the past—the olden times—that we have all been hypnotized into the idea that the golden age of the world was in the olden times. But my story will have shown you that the whole history of the earth has been one of gradual development, of progress, of slow and painful climbing through the ages.

Not only have the hills and the mountains, the rivers and the stars, the trees and the cattle, the beasts and the birds, been developing, but man himself—his mind and his body—have been developing. The Hindu of long, long ago sang truly when he said:—

Slow grows the splendid pattern that it plans
Its wistful hands between.
This is its work upon the things you see.
The unseen things are more; men's hearts and minds,
The thoughts of peoples, and their ways and wills—
These, too, the great Law binds.

I hope you have seen, as you have been reading, that all things work in response to Law! And the laws of Nature are few and simple. You will see, in whatever direction you look, that everything has developed from the simple to the complex, and that nothing abides for long. In the olden time, in the far back time, the Egyptians built pyramids, and raised the loveliest buildings that ever had been seen. Yet, if you trace their history back, you will find that their mighty civilization came from the simple savage. The beautiful carvings of their papyrus columns were but the imitations of the papyrus plants with which their ancestors adorned their huts. The fluted columns in enduring stone were but the remembrance of the bundles of reeds bound together with which the early Egyptians made their simple dwellings. Before the Egyptians had learned the use of metals they had stone tools, as other savages had; and the first metal tools they used were made in the form of the stone tools which their ancestors had used for countless ages before them.

All civilization began in savagery. When you remember that the "ancient Britons" existed only two thousand years ago, and that when Caesar landed on the south coast of England he was met by painted savages, clad in skins, armed with spears and shields, you wonder if civilized England, with all her wealth, refinement, poverty, and crime, can have developed in such a brief time. Has everything developed? Yes! Everything has developed, just as I have been explaining to you that the world itself has developed from a fire-mist. As you read more widely and think more deeply—as I hope you will do—you will find that the story I have told you falls into line with all the new knowledge of the world, and with all the facts that come under your observation. All things develop, unfold, evolve, and progress.

I have told you so little about the world and its

development that I feel almost, as if I should start again and try to make it clear and simpler. Yet, if I did, perhaps it would be no clearer to you at the end; for all I hope to do is to set your mind at work, so that you may have a broader outlook on the world, and a more intelligent idea of its origin. Life and death and joy and woe are forever mixed up here. As an ancient poet said:—

Mingled is death's moan
With wail of childhood issuing from the womb;
Nor ever night did fail, nor dawn arise,
Which heard not, blent with infancy's weak cries,
The sob that speaks of darkness and the tomb.

It seems to me that the story I have told you is full of hope for the race, because it points forward to greater development—to a richer, fuller development. It suggests that the German philosopher Nietzsche was not far wrong when he prophesied that a time will come when all men will be as good as the best men are now. That seems to me to be a far cry considering the barbarism of the world. And yet the long ages of struggle in the past gives one great hope for the future. We are still barbarous, even in our most civilized communities, and it may be true (I think it is), as Nietzsche says, that men will some day look back on us as we look back on the apes.

When I go over the story of the origin of the earth, as I understand it, my soul is filled with a joyous anticipation of the future of the world, and I want so to live that the world will be the better for my having lived. None of us can do much to amend the world; but we can each do a little, and it is all the littles that make what the Scotchman calls the "muckles." We are each but atoms in the world's progress, and the progress is painfully slow; but we can each help a bit; and we can do that best when we understand what the world is and how it develops. Hitherto all progress has been very slow, because it was unconscious; but now that we are coming to realize the way in which Nature works, we are bound to adopt a conscious method, working with Nature, so that our progress will be more rapid in the future than it has been in the past. And so this good old world is bound to improve with each generation.

As I look over the chapters I have written, do you know the thing that strikes me most forcibly in all I have said? It is this: that we live in a world of miracle, in a world of mystery and beauty and glory and eternal wonder. I have been talking to myself very frequently when I seemed to be talking to you, for I realize that I have gone about the world with my eyes only half-opened to the glory of it all. It is a wonderful world we live in, and I am glad that I was born; and I am sorry I did not understand earlier what life was, for I might have got so much more out of life while I had it. I hope you will realize what I mean, and come to enjoy life with open eyes and grateful heart. Your simple question as to the origin of the world has done me a great deal of good, and if my work does you half as much good as it has done me I shall be rewarded indeed.

Now, in closing, I want to quote a few words from Sir E. Ray Lankester's book, *The Kingdom of Man*. I quote him because he seems to me to be a great man and a good man, one who has been in the forefront of the scientific world almost as far back as I remember. And this quotation is on a subject that I know your grandfather has often thought about as he has read, and that is religion! How far does my story interfere with religion? Listen to what Sir Ray says:—

"It should, I think, be recognized that there is no essential antagonism between the scientific spirit and what is called the religious sentiment. 'Religion,' said Bishop Creighton, 'means the knowledge of our destiny and of the means of fulfilling it.' We can say no more, and no less, of science. Men of science seek in all reverence to discover the Al-

mighty, the Everlasting. They claim sympathy and friendship with those who, like themselves, have turned away from the more material struggles of human life, and have set their hearts and minds on the knowledge of the Eternal."

One other thing I would like to add to that; and it is this: We are living in a wonderful age, in an age of awakening, of looking upwards, of larger ideals and greater hopes, and I am glad to be alive in this age; for I feel, as the old hymn says,—

We are living, we are dwelling,
In a grand, an awful time;
In an age, on ages telling
To be living is sublime.

THE END.

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