

# The Origin of the World

By R. McMillan.

## EARLY MEN. CHAPTER XXI.

Once upon a time I heard a story, from the Arabic, which interested me very greatly. It was the story of a garden in the Persian country. The rose said to the lily: "I think that our gardener is a very wonderful man." "Yes," replied the lily, "I quite agree with you. What a long time he lives, and he never changes!" "That is a curious thing about him," said the rose; and here her voice sank to a mysterious whisper as she added: "I think he lives for ever, because the rose that died soon after I was born, an old rose, said that he was just the same when she was born." The lily bowed her gentle head, and replied: "Yes I think he lives for ever."

You see, little girl, it all depends on the point of view. To the roses in the garden, the man who looked after them appeared to be immortal, simply because their lives were so very short. So the mountains appear to us to be everlasting, because we live such a little while. And the world appears to us like the gardener—to live for ever. But nothing lives for ever! All things pass—worlds, suns, systems—everything has its day, and then fades away. Nothing vanishes, as far as we know; but everything changes its shape. We cannot think of real things going to nothing, any more than we can think of something coming from nothing. This may seem to be an out-of-the-way subject, yet it all belongs to the question of the origin of the world. Such a lot of things belong to it! Everything belongs to it, I think.

You have never been to England, have you? Perhaps you will go some day. When you get to London, you will find there the mightiest city in the world, with nearly twice as many people in it as there are in the whole of Australia. And yet history goes back to the time when London was only a village, by a great river, with a few poor fishermen on its banks. Two thousand year ago there was no London at all, for when the Romans were in England they did not seem to think that the bank of the Thames was a great place; nor did the people who came after them realize for a long time how important the river was. When the kings were first crowned in England they were crowned at Winchester. London is quite modern, but when you drive through it on the top of a bus it seems to have always been. Nothing has always been! Nothing endures in the whole wide world. Everything fades and fails in all the wide universe, even men. A great poet once wrote:—

For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts;  
Even one thing befalleth them;  
As the one dieth, so dieth the other;  
Yea, they have all one breath;  
So that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast;  
For all is vanity.  
All go unto one place;  
All are of the dust,  
And all turn to dust again.

There are many people who think this is not true, but I never argue with a poet. You will find these lines in the Bible, an old and noble book, with which few people appear to be acquainted.

What I want you to understand is that London was not always the same as it is now. I think you understand that, do you not? But the climate used to be different also. When you hear a man say, "I think the seasons are changing; they are nothing like what they were when I was a boy," you can afford to smile to yourself. But be sure that you do it to yourself. The seasons never change in the lifetime of a man. The seasons change only in millions of years. It was colder in London 240,000 years ago than it is now. You may, indeed, take it as a fact that the climate of London has been different several times. Let me tell you a curious thing, on the authority of Edward Clodd. When they were digging for the foundation of Drummond's new bank, at Charing Cross, in London, a few years ago, they found some strange bones, which were identified as those of the Cave Lion, a long extinct beast;

the tusks and bones of the mammoth, or woolly-haired elephant, the bones of the Irish deer, the rhinoceros, extinct oxen, red deer, etc. How had they come where they were? Think of a bold rhinoceros roaming about where London is now! Think of a woolly-haired elephant there, too!

It seems to me to be quite impossible till I remember the changes that the world has seen. I think you understand that the climate of the Coal Age must have been hot and steamy. Well, coal was formed near to the place we now call the South Pole. Professor David and all his merry men, when they went with the Shackleton expedition, found it hidden under the ice and snow of the Antarctic world. There must have been a time when the weather was hot at the Poles. How long since? I do not know. Nobody knows; but, anyway, years would be of no value to measure with in such a case. We are in the position of the rose and the lily: our lives are so short that we cannot realize these tremendous stretches of time.

But where were men all this time? There were men of a sort, even when the woolly elephant was living in London. But they were of a very poor type. I have some pictures of the skulls of the very early men; but they are quite different from those of the Greeks, or from our own. The first men were of a very low, bestial type, and yet they were different from the monkeys, or any of the other beasts. I feel I ought not to speak for myself here, as the subject is a deep one, and requires a specialist to deal with it. The greatest and most honoured specialist that I know of is Sir E. Ray Lankester, who has been President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Director of the British Museum, and lots of other things. He wrote a book called *The Kingdom of Man*, which was really founded on three addresses he delivered at Oxford and other places. I want to quote his words, which will show you that man is very ancient. He says ("Nature's Insurgent Son," Chap. VII):—

"The immense antiquity of man was established and accepted on all sides just before Mr. Darwin published his book on *The Origin of Species*. The palaeolithic elements of the river gravels, though probably made much more than 150,000 years ago, do not, any more than do the imperfect skulls occasionally found in association with them, indicate a condition of the human race greatly more monkey-like than is presented by existing savage races. The implements themselves are manufactured with great skill and artistic feeling. Within the last ten years much rougher flint implements, of peculiar types, have been discovered in gravel which are 500 feet above the level of the existing rivers. These eoliths of the south of England indicate a race of men of less developed skill than the makers of the palaeolithic, and carry the antiquity of man at least as far back beyond the palaeoliths as these are from the present day. We have as yet found no remains giving the direct basis for conclusions on the subject; but, judging by the analogy (not by any means a conclusive method) furnished by the history of other large animals now living alongside of man—such as the horse, the rhinoceros, the tapir, the wolf, the hyena, and the bear—it is not improbable that it was in the remote period known as the lower Miocene—remote even as compared with the gravels in which eoliths occur—that Natural Selection began to favour that increase in the size of the brain of a large and not very powerful semi-erect ape, which eventuated, after some hundreds of thousands of years, in the breeding-out of a being with a relatively enormous brain-case, a skilful hand, and an inveterate tendency to throw stones, flourish sticks, protect himself in caves, and in general to defeat aggression, and satisfy his natural appetites by the use of his wits, rather than by strength alone, in which, however, he was not deficient."

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