

**HENRY DRUMMOND**

# THE ASCENT OF MAN

THE LOWELL LECTURES

ON

# THE ASCENT OF MAN

BY

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## PREFACE

"THE more I think of it," says Mr. Ruskin, "I find this conclusion more impressed upon me — that the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to *see* something, and tell what it *saw* in a plain way." In these pages an attempt is made to tell "in a plain way" a few of the things which Science is now seeing with regard to the Ascent of Man. Whether these seeings are there at all is another matter. But, even if visions, every thinking mind, through whatever medium, should look at them. What Science has to say about *himself* is of transcendent interest to Man, and the practical bearings of this theme are coming to be more vital than any on the field of knowledge. The thread which binds the facts is, it is true, but a hypothesis. As the theory, nevertheless, with which at present all scientific work is being done, it is assumed in every page that follows.

Though its stand-point is Evolution and its subject Man, this book is far from being designed to prove that Man has relations, compromising or otherwise, with lower animals. Its theme is Ascent, not Descent. It is a History, not an Argument. And Evolution, in the narrow sense in which it is often used when applied to Man, plays little part in the drama outlined here. So far as the general scheme of Evolution is introduced — and in the Introduction and elsewhere this is done at length — the object is the important one of pointing out how its nature has been misconceived, indeed how its greatest factor has been overlooked in almost all contemporary scientific thinking. Evolution was given to the modern world out of focus, was first seen by it out of focus, and has remained out of focus to the present hour. Its general basis has never been re-examined since the time of Mr. Darwin; and not only such speculative sciences as Teleology, but working sciences like Sociology have been led astray by a fundamental omission. An Evolution Theory drawn to scale, and with the lights and shadows properly adjusted — adjusted to the whole truth and reality of Nature and of Man — is needed at present as a standard for modern thought; and though a reconstruction of such magnitude is not here presumed, a primary object of these pages is to supply at least the accents for such a scheme.

Beyond an attempted readjustment of the accents there is nothing here for the specialist — except, it may be, the reflection of his own work. Nor, apart from Teleology, is there anything for the theologian. The limitations of a lecture-audience made the treatment of such themes as might appeal to him impossible; while owing to the brevity of the course, the Ascent had to be stopped at a point where all the higher interest begins. All that the present volume covers is the Ascent of Man, the Individual, during the earlier stages of his evolution. It is a study in embryos, in rudiments, in installations; the scene is the primeval forest; the date, the world's dawn. Tracing his rise as far as Family Life, this history does not even follow him into the Tribe; and as it is only then that social and moral life begin in earnest, no formal discussion of these high themes occurs. All the higher forces and phenomena with which the sciences of Psychology, Ethics, and Theology usually deal come on the world's stage at a later date, and no one need be surprised if the semi-savage with whom we leave off is found wanting in so many of the higher potentialities of a human being.

The Ascent of Mankind, as distinguished from the Ascent of the Individual, was originally summarized in one or two closing lectures, but this stupendous subject would require a volume for itself, and these fragments have been omitted for the present. Doubtless it may disappoint some that at the close of all the bewildering vicissitudes recorded here, Man should appear, after all, so poor a creature. But the great lines of his youth are the lines of his maturity, and it is only by studying these, in themselves and in what they connote, that the nature of Evolution and the quality of Human Progress can be perceived.

HENRY DRUMMOND

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## INTRODUCTION

### I

#### *EVOLUTION IN GENERAL*

THE last romance of Science, the most daring it has ever tried to pen, is the Story of the Ascent of Man. Withheld from all the wistful eyes that have gone before, whose reverent ignorance forbade their wisest minds to ask to see it, this final volume of Natural History has begun to open with our century's close. In the monographs of His and Minot, the Embryology of Man has already received a just expression; Darwin and Haeckel have traced the origin of the Animal-Body; the researches of Romanes mark a beginning with the Evolution of Mind; Herbert Spencer has elaborated theories of the development of Morals; Edward Caird of the Evolution of Religion. Supplementing the contributions of these authorities, verifying, criticizing, combating, rebutting, there works a multitude of others who have devoted their lives to the same rich problems, and already every chapter of the bewildering story has found its editors.

Yet, singular though the omission may seem, no connected outline of this great drama has yet been given us. These researches, preliminary reconnaissances though they be, are surely worthy of being looked upon as a whole. No one can say that this multitude of observers is not in earnest, nor their work honest, nor their methods competent to the last powers of science. Whatever the uncertainty of the field, it is due to these pioneer minds to treat their labour with respect. What they see in the unexplored land in which they travel belongs to the world. By just such methods, and by just such men, the map of the world of thought is filled in — here from the tracing up of some great river, there from a bearing taken roughly in a darkened sky, yonder from a sudden glint of the sun on a far-off mountain-peak, or by a swift induction of an adventurous mind from a momentary glimpse of a natural law. So knowledge grows; and in a century which has added to the sum of human learning more than all the centuries that are past, it is not to be conceived that some further revelation should not await us on the highest themes of all.

The day is for ever past when science need apologize for treating Man as an object of natural research. Hamlet's "being of large discourse, looking before and after" is withal a part of Nature, and can be made neither larger nor smaller, anticipate less nor prophesy less, because we investigate, and perhaps discover, the secret of his past. And should that past be proved to be related in undreamed-of ways to that of all other things in Nature, "all other things" have that to gain by the alliance which philosophy and theology for centuries have striven to win for them. Every step in the proof of the oneness in a universal evolutionary process of this divine humanity of ours is a step in the proof of the divinity of all lower things. And what is of infinitely greater moment, each footprint discovered in the Ascent of Man is a guide to the step to be taken next. To discover the rationale of social progress is the ambition of this age. There is an extraordinary human interest abroad about this present world itself, a yearning desire, not from curious but for practical reasons, to find some light upon the course; and as the goal comes nearer the eagerness passes into suspense to know the shortest and the quickest road to reach it. Hence the Ascent of Man is not only the noblest problem which science can ever study, but the practical bearings of this theme are great beyond any other on the roll of knowledge.

Now that the first rash rush of the evolutionary invasion is past, and the sins of its youth atoned for by sober concession, Evolution is seen to be neither more nor less than the story of creation as told by those who know it best. "Evolution," says Mr. Huxley, "or development is at present employed in biology as a general name for the history of the steps by which any living being has acquired the