

THE DESCENT OF MAN.

The publication of a fresh book by Mr. Charles Darwin, on the "Descent of Man," naturally leads one to serious reflections concerning his ancestry. One would think that the development of man from a sponge, or a spore, or a polyp, should be styled an ascent rather than a descent. But Mr. Darwin evidently prefers, as an Englishman, to consider the question as one of pedigree rather than of evolution. There are a great many families in England proud of their descent, but, except Napoleon Bonaparte and Andrew Johnson, we do not remember any prominent instances in which men have boasted of their ascent. Mr. Darwin, with a keen eye to humor, proposes to trace the blood of the nobility of England a good way back of William the Conqueror—back to a point at which they would be very glad to get off by acknowledging themselves to be of kindred stock with Ginx's baby, as a compromise to avoid having their pedigree traced to a chimpanzee, and thence by a few farther removes to a mushroom. As a grim satire on pride of ancestry Mr. Darwin's book is quietly crushing. As a collection of patient and laborious investigations, it deserves to be read by everybody. As an attempt to explain the process of creation without a Creator, it is, perhaps, the most elaborate half-truth ever published. It shows that, the principles of vegetable and animal life being once introduced into matter, the organizations which result are capable of almost endless minute changes and development. Here, however, it stops. What is this mystery of vegetable and animal life, without whose inspiration matter lacks all power to put itself into organized forms? Mr. Darwin seeks to show that higher types of life spring from higher forms of organization. We

may infer as his doctrine that life itself, in all its forms, results from organization. But, on the contrary, all the facts of science show that organization results from life. Life, the moment it manifests itself in connection with matter, suspends and reverses all chemical laws pertaining to dead matter, and institutes a new chemistry of its own. When it departs the chemical laws resume their sway. What is life? Mr. Darwin's hunt among the varying characteristics of species leaves this agency—life—as all-potent and mysterious as it was left by Moses, when he described it as the breathing of God into a form made of the dust of the earth, thereby producing a living soul. In all the researches of savans they find no starting point of life. Unless its germ exists they cannot develop any of its manifestations. Without the seed, or the germ, or the spore, they can produce nothing having either vegetable or animal life. Even dead matter is inspired and controlled by certain laws of attraction and cohesion, of combination and repulsion, which set it in motion and give it forces and powers as mysterious as the manifestations of life among plants and animals. This reign of law is the soul of unorganized matter, as inexplicable as the reign of life over organized beings. Whence come life and law? Darwinism may trace some of their effects. But these two great causes remain as mysterious as ever, or, in the religious sense, as manifest as ever—the soul of God in nature. Whatever will explain their existence will not only clear up the process of creation, but all the problems of our spiritual being. The truly scientific position which every writer on cosmogony and physical science should assume, is that taken by Humboldt in his *Kosmos*. It is, in substance, that science traces the laws which govern matter, whether existing without life or in connection with life; but, when asked to explain the origin of life itself, it finds itself invited into a field of investigation which eludes all the tests and standards of science, and on which the scientific man, as such, reverently declines to enter.
