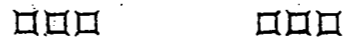


OUTLINE OF HISTORY

By H. G. Wells



WHILE the mechanical revolution which the growth of physical science had brought about was destroying the ancient social classification of the civilized state which had been evolved through thousands of years, and producing new possibilities and new ideals of a righteous human community and a righteous world order, a change at least as great and novel was going on in the field of religious thought. That same growth of scientific knowledge from which sprang the mechanical revolution was the moving cause of these religious disturbances.

In the opening chapter of this "Outline" we have given the main story of the Record of the Rocks; we have shown life for the little beginning of consciousness that is in the still waiting vastness of the void of space and time. But before the end of the eighteenth century this enormous prospect of the past which fills a modern mind with humility and illimitable hope was hidden from the general consciousness of our race. It was veiled by the curtain of a Sumerian legend. The heavens were no more than a stage background to a little drama of kings. Men had been too occupied with their own private passions and personal affairs to heed the intimations of their own destiny that lay about them everywhere.

They learnt their true position in space long before they placed themselves in time. We have already named the earlier astronomers and told how Galileo was made to recant his assertion that the earth moved round the sun. He was made to do so by the church, and the church was stirred to make him do so because any doubt that the world was the center of the universe seemed to strike fatally at the authority of Christianity.

NOW, upon that matter the teller of modern history is obliged to be at once cautious and bold. He has to pick his way between cowardly evasion on the one hand, and partisanship on the other. As far as possible he must confine himself to the facts and restrain his opinions. Yet it is well to remember that no opinions can be altogether restrained. The writer has his own very strong and definite persuasions, and the reader must bear that in mind.

It is a fact in history that the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth had in it something profoundly new and creative; He preached a new kingdom of heaven in the hearts and in the world of men. There was nothing in His teaching, so far as we can judge it at this distance of time, to clash or interfere with any discovery or expansion of the history of the world and mankind.

But it is equally a fact in history that St. Paul and his successors added to or completed or imposed upon or substituted another doctrine for—as you may prefer to think—the plain and profoundly revolutionary teachings of Jesus by expounding a subtle and complex theory of salvation, a salvation which could be attained very largely by belief and formalities, without any serious disturbance of the believer's ordinary habits and occupations, and that this Pauline teaching did involve very definite beliefs about the history of the world and man.

IT is not the business of the historian to controvert or explain these matters; the question of their ultimate significance depends upon the theologian; the historian's concern is merely with the fact that official Christianity throughout the world adopted St. Paul's view so plainly expressed in his epistles and so untraceable in the gospels, that the meaning of religion lay not in the future, but in the past, and that Jesus was not so much a teacher of wonderful new things, as a predestinate divine blood sacrifice of deep mystery and sacredness made in atonement of a particular historical act of

disobedience to the Creator committed by our first parents, Adam and Eve, in response to the temptation of a serpent in the garden of Eden. Upon the belief in that fall as a fact, and not upon the personality of Jesus of Nazareth, upon the theories of Paul, and not upon the injunctions of Jesus, doctrinal Christianity built itself.

We have already noted that this story of the special creation of the world and of Adam and Eve and the serpent was also an ancient Babylonian story, and probably a still more ancient Sumerian story, and that the Jewish sacred books were the medium by which this very ancient and primitive "heliolithic" serpent legend entered Christianity. Wherever official Christianity has gone, it has taken this story with it. It has tied itself up to that story.

UNTIL a century and less ago the whole Christianized world felt bound to believe, and did believe, that the universe had been specially created in the course of six days by the word of God a few thousand years before—according to Bishop Ussher, 4004 B. C. (The Universal History, in 42 volumes, published in 1779 by a group of London booksellers, discusses whether the precise date for the first day of creation was March 21 or September 21, 4004 B. C., and inclines to the view that the latter was the more probable season.)

Upon this historical assumption rested the religious fabric of the western and westernized civilization; and yet the whole world was littered, the hills, mountains, deltas and seas were bursting with evidence of its utter absurdity. The religious life of the leading nations, still a very intense and sincere religious life, was going on in a house of history built upon sand.

There is frequent recognition in classical literature of a sounder cosmogony. Aristotle was aware of the broad principles of modern geology; they shine through the speculations of Lucretius, and we have noted also Leonardo da Vinci's (1452-1519) lucid interpretation of fossils. A Frenchman, Descartes (1596-1650), speculated boldly upon the incandescent beginnings of our globe, and a Dane, Steno (1631-87), began the collection of fossils and the description of strata. But it was only as the eighteenth century drew to its close that the systematic study of geology assumed such proportions as to affect the general authority of the Bible version of that ancient Sumerian narrative.

CONTEMPORANEOUSLY with the Universal History quoted above a great French naturalist, Buffon, was writing upon the Epochs of Nature (1778) and boldly extending the age of the world to 70,000 to 75,000 years. He divided his story into six epochs to square with the six days of the Creation story. These days, it was argued, were figurative days; they were really ages. There was a general disposition to do this on the part of the new science of geology. By that accommodating device geology contrived to make a peace with orthodox religious teaching that lasted until the middle of the nineteenth century.

We can not trace here the contributions of such men as Hutton and Playfair and Sir Charles Lyell and the Frenchmen, Lamarck and Cuvier, in unfolding and developing the record of the rocks. It was only slowly that the general intelligence of the western world was awakened to two disconcerting facts: firstly, that the succession of life in the geological record did not correspond to the acts of the six days of creation; and, secondly, that the record, in harmony with a mass of biological facts, pointed away from the Bible assertion of a separate creation of each species straight toward a genetic relation be-

tween all forms of life, in which even man was included!

THE importance of this last issue to the existing doctrinal system was manifest. If all the animals and man had been evolved in this ascendant manner, then there had been no first parents, no Eden and no fall. And if there had been no fall, then the entire historical fabric of Christianity, the story of the first sin and the reason for an atonement, upon which the current teaching based Christian emotion and morality, collapsed like a house of cards.

It was with something like horror, therefore, that great numbers of honest and religious-spirited men followed the work of the English naturalist, Charles Darwin (1809-82); in 1859 he published his "Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection," a powerful and permanently valuable exposition of that conception of the change and development of species which we have sketched briefly in Chapter III; and in 1871 he completed the outline of his work with the "Descent of Man," which brought man definitely into the same scheme of development with the rest of life.

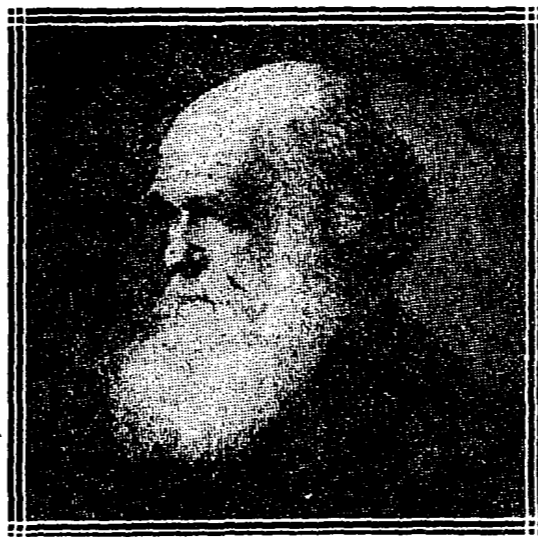
MANY men and women are still living who can remember the dismay and distress among ordinary intelligent people in the western communities as the invincible case of the biologists and geologists against the orthodox Christian cosmogony unfolded itself. The minds of many resisted the new knowledge instinctively and irrationally. Their whole moral edifice was built upon false history; they were too old and set to rebuild it; they felt the practical truth of their moral convictions, and this new truth seemed to them to be incompatible with that.

They believed that to assent to it would be to prepare a moral collapse for the world. And so they produced a moral collapse by not assenting to it. The universities in England particularly, being primarily clerical in their constitution, resisted the new learning very bitterly. During the seventies and eighties a stormy controversy raged throughout the civilized world. The quality of the discussions and the fatal ignorance of the church may be gauged by a description in Hackett's "Commonplace Book" of a meeting of the British Association in 1860; at which Bishop Wilberforce assailed Huxley, the great champion of the Darwinian views, in this fashion:

FACING "Huxley with a smiling insolence, he begged to know, was it through his grandfather or grandmother that he claimed his descent from a monkey? Huxley turned to his neighbor and said, 'The Lord hath delivered him into my hands.'" Then he stood before us and spoke these tremendous words, 'He was not ashamed to have a monkey for his ancestor; but he would be ashamed to be connected with a man who used great gifts to obscure the truth.'" (Another version has it: "I have certainly said that a man has no reason to be ashamed of having an ape for his grandfather. If there were an ancestor whom I should feel ashamed in recalling, it would rather be a man of restless and versatile intellect who plunges into scientific questions with which he has no real acquaintance, only to obscure them by an aimless rhetoric and distract the attention of his audience from the real point at issue by eloquent digressions and skilled appeals to prejudice.")

These words were certainly spoken with passion. The scene was one of great excitement. A lady fainted, says Hackett. * * * Such was the temper of this controversy.

The Darwinian movement took formal Christianity unawares, suddenly. Formal Christianity was confronted with a clearly demonstrated error in her theological state-



CHARLES DARWIN

ments. The Christian theologians were neither wise enough nor mentally nimble enough to accept the new truth, modify their formulae and insist upon the living and undiminished vitality of the religious reality those formulae had hitherto sufficed to express. For the discovery of man's descent from the subhuman forms does not even remotely touch the teaching of the Kingdom of Heaven. Yet priests and bishops raged at Darwin; foolish attempts were made to suppress Darwinian literature and to insult and discredit the exponents of the new views. There was much wild talk of the "antagonism" of religion and science.

Now in all ages there have been skeptics in Christendom. The Emperor Frederick II was certainly a skeptic; in the eighteenth century Gibbon and Voltaire were openly anti-Christian, and their writings influenced a number of scattered readers. But these were exceptional people. * * * Now the whole of Christendom became as a whole skeptical. This new controversy touched everybody who read a book or heard intelligent conversation.

A NEW generation of young people grew up, and they found the defenders of Christianity in an evil temper, fighting their cause without dignity or fairness. It was the orthodox theology that the new scientific advances had compromised, but the angry theologians declared that it was religion.

In the end men may discover that religion shines all the brighter for the loss of its doctrinal wrappings, but to the young it seemed as if indeed there had been a conflict of science and religion, and that in that conflict science had won.

The immediate effect of this great dispute upon the ideas and methods of people in the prosperous and influential classes throughout the westernized world was very detrimental indeed. The new biological science was bringing nothing constructive as yet to replace the old moral stand-by.

A real demoralization ensued. The general level of social life in those classes was far higher in the early twentieth than in the early seventeenth century, but in one respect, in respect to disinterestedness and conscientiousness in these classes, it is probable that the tone of the earlier age was better than the latter.

IN the owing and active classes of the seventeenth century, in spite of a few definite "infidels," there was probably a much higher percentage of men and women who prayed sincerely, who searched their souls to find if they had done evil, and who were pre-

pared to suffer and make great sacrifices for what they conceived to be right, than in the opening years of the twentieth century.

There was a real loss of faith after 1859. The true gold of religion was in many cases thrown away with the worn-out purse that had contained it for so long, and it was not recovered. Toward the close of the nineteenth century a crude misunderstanding of Darwinism had become the fundamental mindstuff of great masses of the "educated" everywhere. The seventeenth century kings and owners and rulers had had the idea at the back of their minds that they prevailed by the will of God! they really feared him, they got priests to put things right for them with Him; when they were wicked, they tried not to think of Him.

But the old faith of the kings, owners and rulers of the opening twentieth century had faded under the actinic light of scientific criticism. Prevalent peoples at the close of the nineteenth century believed that they prevailed by virtue of the struggle for existence, in which the strong and cunning get the better of the weak and confiding. And they believed further that they had to be strong, energetic, ruthless, "practical," egotistical, because God was dead, and had always, it seemed, been dead—which was going altogether further than the new knowledge justified.

THEY soon got beyond the first crude popular misconception of Darwinism, the idea that every man is for himself alone. But they stuck at the next level. Man, they decided, is a social animal like the Indian hunting dog. He is much more than a dog—but this they did not see. And just as in a pack it is necessary to bully and subdue the younger and weaker for the general good, so it seemed right to them that the big dogs of the human pack should bully and subdue. Hence a new scorn for the idea of democracy that had ruled the earlier nineteenth century, and a revived admiration for the overbearing and the cruel.

It was quite characteristic of the times that Mr. Kipling should lead the children of the middle and upper-class British public back to the jungle to learn "the law," and that in his book "Stalky & Co.," he should give an appreciative description of the torture of two boys by three others, who have by a subterfuge tied up their victims helplessly before revealing their hostile intentions.

It is worth while to give a little attention to this incident in "Stalky & Co.," because it lights up the political psychology of the British empire at the close of the nineteenth century very vividly. The history of the last half century is not to be understood without an understanding of the mental twist which this story exemplifies. The two boys who are tortured are "bullies," that is the excuse of their tormentors, and these latter have further been incited to the orgy by a clergyman.

NOTHING can restrain the gusta with which they (and Mr. Kipling) set about the job. Before resorting to torture, the teaching seems to be, see that you pump up a little justifiable moral indignation, and all will be well. If you have the authorities on your side, then you can not be to blame. Such, apparently, is the simple doctrine of this typical imperialist. But every bully has to the best of his ability followed that doctrine since the human animal developed sufficient intelligence to be consciously cruel.

Another point in the story is very significant, indeed. The head master and his clerical assistant are both represented as being privy to the affair. They want this bullying

to occur. Instead of exercising their own authority, they use these boys, who are Mr. Kipling's heroes, to punish the two victims. Head master and clergyman turn a deaf ear to the complaints of an indignant mother.

Tomorrow—"Development of Nationalism."