

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE II.

THE LANSING SKULL AND THE EARLY
HISTORY OF MANKIND.

BY G. FREDERICK WRIGHT.

THE skeleton at Lansing, an account of which was given by Mr. Warren Upham in the October number of the *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA* (see pp. 730-743), continues to be one of the most prominent topics of discussion in scientific circles, and attracted special attention at the recent international meeting of Americanists in New York. Since the discovery, other portions of human skeletons have been found immediately adjacent to the original tunnel. There is now absolutely no ground to question the undisturbed character of the deposit of loess beneath which the skeleton was buried.

In the *American Journal of Geology*, Professor T. C. Chamberlin has given a detailed discussion of the situation, with the result of making the date of the deposit considerably more recent than that given by Mr. Upham, though of this he is by no means positive. According to him probably the antiquity of the burial is to be measured merely "by the time occupied by the Missouri River in lowering its bottom, two miles more or less in width, somewhere from fifteen to twenty-five feet, a very respectable antiquity, but much short of the close of the glacial invasion." But, as this question is to receive ample discussion at the convocation of scientific societies in Washington the first week in January, we will reserve further consideration of the point until it can be done in the fuller light shed upon it by that occasion. From the facts already in hand,

however, and the character of many of the objections which have been urged against the interpretation given by Mr. Upham, it will be profitable to consider a few of the theoretical aspects relating to the natural forces involved in the phenomena.

It will probably be a surprise to most of our theological readers to be told that the most persistent *a priori* objections to a recognition of this skeleton as of glacial age come from the anthropologists. The skull does not differ, in its shape and capacity, to any appreciable extent, from that of some of the modern Indian tribes, or at any rate from individuals of those tribes. The bone, however, is in a partially fossilized condition, so as utterly to preclude the idea of its burial within a very recent time.

But, in considering the presumptions against a great antiquity with which the anthropologists approach the subject, no undue reflections upon their honesty or ability should be made. A preliminary question arising in connection with every new fact is, How is it related to other facts of which we are cognizant, or theories which we are supposed to have good grounds for cherishing? It is always important to remember that no fact can be established by human evidence with absolute certainty. The only absolute certainty is that of the individual witnesses who think they have seen certain things, and think they have reported them with a certain degree of fullness and accuracy. The facts at Lansing as the public understands them are simply the reports and interpretations of the various scientific men who have visited the locality. If the anthropologists see other things in the facts which would render the theory of the geologists extremely improbable, it is perfectly fair that they should challenge the theory, and call for very explicit proof.

Now the anthropologists do find, in what they call the "modern" character of the skull, evidence which is con-

vincing to some of them that it cannot be very ancient. This evidence, however, when it is examined, is, on their part, merely a theory, for which the general public may demand much clearer evidence than has yet been presented. The objections of the anthropologists are easily seen to arise from two causes: (1st) their adherence to a hard-and-fast theory of evolution through a very gradual and slow rate of change; (2d) belief in the extreme antiquity of the glacial period. They assume that glacial man must be very ancient, and therefore could not have had a brain capacity approaching that of the modern Indian, but must have had a skull somewhere midway between that of man and that of an ape.

But all this is theoretical, and a great advance upon the facts upon which the theories are based. The skeleton from Java, discovered a few years ago by Dr. Du Bois, is supposed by him both to be preglacial and to be not that of man, but of an intermediate link between man and some lower species of the anthropoid family. Therefore he called it "Pithecanthropos." The lowest skulls of the Neanderthal type, which have been considered human, are still as capacious as those of many individuals of existing races, the Neanderthal skull itself being pronounced by Professor Huxley to be capacious enough to hold the brain of a philosopher.

There is not adequate scientific evidence going to show that the origin of man, even on the evolutionary hypothesis, was not through a sudden leap, which may well involve a divine interference, and might properly be called a miracle. Those evolutionists who maintain that the passage from the physical development of the lower members of the anthropoid family to that of man (who is called "Homo sapiens") was by infinitesimal stages have few facts to go upon, and are taking an immense leap in the dark. Such guesses are no proper basis upon which to

found presumptions against the acceptance of facts of observation.

One of the most difficult classes of facts for the thoroughgoing evolutionists to explain on their theory is just that which appears in this Lansing skeleton. It is as clear as can be, that, since the earliest dawn of history, there has been no marked change in the human skeleton. The earliest mummies of Egypt differ, anatomically, in scarcely any respect from individuals found living in that locality at the present time; while the dawn of civilization, both in the valley of the Nile and of the Euphrates, goes back to an era not much later than that assigned by Mr. Upham to the Lansing skeleton. At that early time, man was capable of accomplishments scarcely inferior to those of the human race at the present time. If the thoroughgoing evolutionists maintain their theory of an extremely gradual evolution of the human race from a lower order of beings, they must have an immense stretch of time back of the foundation of the early civilization of Egypt and Babylonia.

But this they are by no means sure of getting from the geologists. Geological time is not that enormous quantity which it was supposed to be twenty-five years ago. During that period there has been a revolution of opinion respecting geological time which is as yet scarcely appreciated by anthropologists and theologians. Instead of talking, as Charles Darwin did in the first edition of his "Origin of Species," of 366,000,000 years as a "mere trifle" of geological time, the geologists are now striving hard to save the moiety of 100,000,000 years for their theoretical purposes; while the astronomers and physicists, headed by Lord Kelvin, would limit it to 24,000,000. The extent to which this curtailment of geological time necessarily limits the antiquity of man is by no means yet fully appreciated by the general, or even a large part of the scientific

public. Geological time is not one hundredth part as long as it was supposed to be fifty years ago. The popular writers who glibly talk of the antiquity of man upon the basis of the old geologic ratios are behind the times, and are ignorant of the new light that, like a flood, has been shed upon this whole question during the last few years.

The facts of geology are more and more clearly showing that the last stage of excessive instability of the crust of the earth was not many hundred thousand years ago, and continued down to a period closely approximating the historical era. If any one maintains that Niagara River began the cutting of its postglacial gorge much earlier than the time when civilization was already far advanced in Egypt and Babylonia, he is compelled to do it by ignoring all the *prima facie* facts, and relying upon vague theories, which are very difficult of establishment.

Of one thing the Lansing skull is a clear and important witness, namely, to an instability of the earth's crust, contemporaneous with the early history of mankind, which is out of all analogy to the present condition of things. The conditions attending the burial of the Lansing skeleton are closely identical to those connected with the burial of the human implements beneath the loess at Kief, Southern Russia.¹

The special interest of biblical students and theologians in the subject arises from its very direct bearing upon the *a priori* objections to the biblical account implying the sudden (and presumably supernatural) appearance of man in the world, and upon the biblical account of a flood as universal as the human race, and implying an exceptional instability of the earth's crust continuing until some time after the introduction of man into the world.

¹ Briefly described in the last number of the *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA* (pp. 709-710), and more fully described, by Professor Armachevsky, in the September number of the *Records of the Past* (pp. 275-278).