

# HUMAN ORIGINS

BY

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"A Modern Zoroastrian," etc.*

Revised by EDWARD CLODD

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## WORKS BY SAMUEL LAING

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## INTRODUCTION

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THE reception which has been given to my former works leads me to believe that they have had a certain educational value for those who, not being specialists, wish to keep themselves abreast of the culture of the day, and to understand the leading results and pending problems of Modern Science. Of these results the most interesting are those which bear upon the origin and evolution of the human race. Thus far, I have treated this question mainly from the point of view of geology and palæontology, and have hardly touched on the province which lies nearest to us, that of history and of prehistoric traditions. In this province, however, a revolution has been effected by modern discoveries, which is no less important than that made by geological research and by the general doctrine of Evolution.

Down to the middle of the last century, and the belief is far from extinct, the Hebrew Bible was held to be the sole and sufficient authority as to the early history of the human race. It was believed, with a certainty which made doubt impious, that the first man Adam was created in the year 4004 B.C., or not quite 6,000 years ago; and that 1,656 years later all human and other life, with the exception of Noah and his wife, their sons and their wives, and pairs of all living creatures, by whom the earth was repopled from the mountain-peak of Ararat as a centre, were destroyed by a universal Deluge.

The latest researches bring to light the existence of uninterrupted historical records, confirmed by contemporary monuments, carrying history back fully 3,000 years before the supposed Creation of Man, and showing even then no trace of a commencement; but populous cities, celebrated temples, great engineering works, and a high state of the arts and of civilisation already existing. This is of the highest interest, both as bearing on the dogma of the inspiration of the Bible, and on the still more important question of the true theory of man's origin and relations to the universe. The so-called conflict between Religion and Science is at bottom one between two conflicting theories of the universe—the first that it is the creation of a personal God who constantly interferes by miracles to correct His original work; the second, that whether the First Cause be a personal God or some Power inscrutable to human faculties, the work was originally so perfect that the whole succession of subsequent events has followed by Evolution acting by invariable laws. The former is the theory of orthodox believers, the latter that of men of science, and of liberal theologians who, like the late Archbishop Temple, find that the theory of "original impress" is more in accordance with the idea of an Omnipotent and Omniscient Creator, to whom "a thousand years are as a day," than the traditional theory of a Creator who constantly intervenes

to supplement and amend His original Creation by supernatural interferences.

It is evidently important for all who desire to arrive at truth, and to keep abreast of the culture of the day, to have some clear conception of what historical and geological records really teach, and what sort of a standard or measuring-rod they supply in helping us to carry back our researches into the depths of prehistoric and of geological time.

I have therefore in this work begun with the historic period, as giving us a standard of time by which to gauge the vastly longer periods which lie behind, and have advanced from this by successive steps through the Neolithic and Paleolithic ages, and the Quaternary and Tertiary periods, so far as the most recent discoveries throw

any light on the mysterious question of Human Origins.

If I have succeeded in stimulating some minds, especially those of my younger readers, and of the working-classes who are striving after culture, to feel an interest in these subjects, and to pursue them further, my object will have been attained. They have been to me the solace of a long life, the delight of many quiet days, and the soother of many troubled ones; and I should be glad to think that I had been the means, however humble, of introducing to others what I have found such a source of enjoyment, and enlisting, if it were only a few, in the service of that "divine Philosophy" in which I have ever found, as Wordsworth did in Nature,

"The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being."