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978-1-108-00074-1 - On the Power, Wisdom and Goodness of God as Manifested in the Creation of Animals and in their History, Habits and Instincts, Volume 1

William Kirby

Excerpt

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THE
HISTORY, HABITS, AND INSTINCTS
OF ANIMALS.

CHAPTER I.

Creation of Animals.

IN no part of creation are the POWER, WISDOM, and GOODNESS, of its beneficent and almighty Author more signally conspicuous than in the various *animals* that inhabit and enliven our globe. The infinite diversity of their forms and organs; the nice adaptation of these to their several functions; the beauty and elegance of a large number of them; the singularity of others; the variety of their motions; their geographical distribution; but, above all, their preeminent utility to mankind, in every state and stage of life, render them objects of the deepest interest both to rich and poor, high and low, wise and unlearned, so that arguments in proof of these primary attributes of the Godhead, drawn from the habits, instincts, and other adjuncts of the

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animal creation, are likely to meet with more universal attention, to be more generally comprehended, to make a deeper and more lasting impression upon the mind, to direct the heart more fervently and devotedly to the maker and giver of these interesting beings, than those which are drawn from more abstruse sources, though really more elevated and sublime.

The history of the animal kingdom naturally commences with the *creation* of animals, and the great events preparatory to it, for when the ALMIGHTY CREATOR, in his wisdom, and by the word of his power, had first brought into being, and afterwards set in order, the heavens and the earth; had caused the latter to bring forth grass, and herb, and tree, and then had placed his sun in the former, that by constant irradiations of light and heat from that central fountain, the life,¹ and motion, which the FIRST MOVER had begun by the incubation of his Spirit, and which now manifested itself in the vegetable kingdom, might be maintained till it had run its destined course. When all things were thus prepared, his next care was to people and enliven the earth with a different and higher class of beings, in whom—to organization, and life, and growth, and reproductive powers,—might be added sensation and voluntary motion. Unpeopled by ani-

¹ See Appendix, note 1.

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mals, the verdant earth in all its primitive and untarnished beauty, though inlaid with flowers exhibiting, in endless variety, every mixture and shade of colour that can glad the sight; though fanned by gales breathing Sabean odours, to gratify the scent; though tempting the appetite by delicious fruits of every flavour, still would be a scene without the breath of life. No motions would be seen but of the passing clouds, of the fluctuating waters, and the waving boughs; no voice heard but of the elements.

Was a single pair placed in this paradise, though at first it would seem that there was gratification for every sense, and joy would possess the heart, and admiration fill the soul with pleasure; yet after the novelty of the spectacle had ceased, and the effect of its first impression was obliterated, a void would soon be felt, something more would seem wanting to animate the otherwise lovely scene; a longing would arise in the mind for some beings, varying in form and magnitude, furnished with organs that would enable them to traverse and enliven the lower regions of the atmosphere, others that might course over the earth's surface, and others that could win their easy way through its waters, so that all, by their numbers, and the variety of their motions, might exhibit a striking and interesting contrast to the fixed and unconscious vitality of the vegetable kingdom.

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But it was not the will of the beneficent Creator to leave such a blank and blot in his creation ; before he created man in his own image, and enthroned him king of the new-made world, he decreed that his dominion also should be an image of his own, over innumerable creatures of every form and grade, each in its place entrusted with a peculiar office and function, and furnished with organs adapted to its work, contributing to its own and the general welfare ; so that all should operate, “ though each in different sort and manner,” to accomplish the great plan of an All-wise Providence.

What was the precise order of creation in the animal kingdom is nowhere clearly revealed in Holy Scripture ; and we can only conjecture, since the most perfect animal, and he who alone belonged to the spiritual and invisible world by his soul, as well as by his body to the visible, was created the last, that the progress was from those that were at the foot of the scale to those that were at the summit. We are told, indeed, in general terms, that on the fifth day, at the divine bidding, the waters, hitherto barren and untenanted, produced abundantly “ *the moving creature that hath life,*” and *fowl* to traverse the firmament. In an instant, in obedience to that quickening word, by the operation of Almighty Power, and under the guidance of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, the boundless ocean with all its tri-

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butary streams became prolific, and brought forth by myriads, in endless and strange diversity, its destined offspring, beginning, perhaps, with the viewless animalcule or the senseless polype, half animal and half plant, and ending with the half fish and half quadruped, cetaceans, and their kindred monsters.¹ Nor was the Ocean prolific of aquatic animals alone, and those whose habitation was the restless world of waters, with all its streams, its caves, and its abysses, it also gave birth to all the winged and feathered tribes—from the brilliant humming bird to the mighty eagle and the giant vulture—that people and enliven the atmospheric sea, and make it the field of their excursions. The animals created on this day were destined to dwell or move, independent of the earth, in a fluid medium of greater or less tenuity, and for that purpose were fitted with appropriate and peculiar organs, in one case both for respiration and locomotion, in the other for locomotion only.

Again the word of power was spoken,—“*Let the earth bring forth,*” and instantly the various tribes of quadrupeds issued from her teeming womb, varying infinitely in size, from the minute harvest-mouse² to the giant bulk of the elephant and hippopotamus; then also the earth-born reptiles, whether four-footed, six-footed, eight-footed,

¹ See Appendix, note 2.

² *Mus messorius*.

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or many-footed, started into life, and connected the terrestrial tribes with those produced from the waters. In the majority of these, the fins of the fishes and cetaceans, and the wings of the birds, were replaced by legs best fitted for motion on the theatre on which they were to act their part, and to fulfil the will of their Creator.

The earth was now completely furnished and decorated to receive her destined king and master. The sun, the moon, and the stars were shedding their kindly influences upon her; she and her fellow planets had commenced their annual and diurnal revolutions; the plants and flowers, her first born progeny, had sprung out of her bosom, and covered her with verdure and beauty; and the fruit and forest trees flourishing in all their glory of leaf, blossom, and fruit, were ready to minister to the support, comfort, and enjoyment of their future lord: the sea, the air, the earth, were each filled with their appropriate inhabitants, and throughout the whole creation was beauty, and grace, and life, and motion, and joy, and jubilee. But still, in the midst of all this apparent glory and activity of vegetable and animal life in the new created world, there was not a single being endued with reason and understanding; one that could elevate its thought above the glorious and wonderful spectacle to the great Author of it, or acknowledge and adore its Creator.

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Amidst this infinite variety of beings there was not a single one which to a material body added an immaterial immortal soul ; so that there was still a great blank in creation. A wonderful and magnificent temple was reared, and shone in glory and beauty, but there was as yet no priest therein to offer up incense to the Deity to whom it was dedicated.

We are now, therefore, to consider the creation of him for whom this high office was reserved, who, as king and priest, was to render to the common Creator the praises due from all created things, and be the spokesman for all the inhabitants of this terrestrial globe.

The vast distance, on this account, intervening between man and the highest animals in the scale of being, appears evident from the different circumstances attending their creation. When they were brought into existence, the word was—“*Let the waters bring forth—Let the earth bring forth,*” from which it should seem that God did not act *immediately* in their creation, except by his agency on those powers that he had established as rulers in nature, and by which he ordinarily taketh hold, as it were, of the material universe. But when a being, combining the spiritual with the material world, is to be created, all the persons of the Godhead unite *immediately* in the work, and without the intervention of any other agent,

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“*Let us make man.*” He was therefore neither sea-born nor earth-born, as some ancient nations claimed to be, but born of God ; though, as Christ moistened clay when he was about to exercise his creative power, in the re-forming of an eye ;¹ so was the humid earth used in the creation of the body of man by his Maker, and when that wonderful machine, with its complex apparatus of organs, both external and internal, was finished ; when a throne and presence chamber were prepared for the intellectual and spiritual, and governing part of his nature, and that wonder-working pulp the brain, with its silver spinal cord and infinitely divaricated threads, already fitted for the mastery of every motive organ, was in a state to transmit without obstruction, each flux and reflux of that subtile fluid, intermediate, as it were, between matter and spirit,² which so instantaneously conveys and causes the execution of the commands of the will by every external bodily organ ; when the heart was ready to beat ; the lungs to play ; the blood to circulate ; and every other system to start for the fulfilment of its prescribed errand. “*Then the Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of lives, and man became a living soul.*” He was now installed into his kingdom over the globe which he inhabited, and dominion was given him over the

¹ John, ix. 6.² See Appendix, note 3.

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inhabitants of the water, of the air, and of the earth; and the divine image, in which he was to be created, was rendered complete.

Now, the generations of the world were perfect and healthful, and God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good. That is,—every individual essence, whether inanimate or animate, was fitted in every respect to answer the end of its creation, and perform its allotted part in contributing to the general welfare. The entire machine was now in action, every separate wheel was revolving, and the will of Him who contrived and fabricated it had full and uninterrupted accomplishment. The instincts of the whole circle of animals urged them, by an irresistible impulse, to fulfil their several functions; I mean those that were necessary to the then state of things: for if the instinct of the predaceous ones was not restrained, they would soon have annihilated the herbivorous ones, even if, as Lightfoot supposes, they were at first created by sevens.¹ They must, therefore, originally have eaten grass or straw like the ox, and neither injured nor destroyed their fellow-beasts of a more harmless character; this, indeed, appears clearly from the terms of the original grant, “*To every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon*

¹ See Appendix, note 4.

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the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat." And to this vegetable diet, before the close of the present scene, we are assured they shall again return so as to render the last age of the world as happy as the original state of man in Paradise.¹ This harmony of the animal creation, continued probably long enough, after the fall, to allow sufficient time for such a multiplication of the flocks and herds, and flights and shoals of the gregarious animals, as would secure them from extinction—but then, as the poet sings :

————— Discord first

Daughter of sin, among th' irrational
 Death introduc'd through fierce antipathy :
 Beast now with beast 'gan war, and fowl with fowl,
 And fish with fish ; to graze the herb all leaving,
 Devour'd each other ; nor stood much in awe
 Of man but fled him, or with count'nance grim
 Glar'd on him passing. These were from without
 The growing miseries which Adam saw.

Had Adam not fallen, this sad change would, probably, never have taken place, for as the author of the book of wisdom argues:—" *God made not death, neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living. For he created all things that they might have their being ; and the generations of the world were healthful : and there is no*

¹ Isaiah, lxxv. 25.