

## PROTEUS.

BY EDWIN MILLER WHEELOCK.

SOME twenty-three centuries ago lived Plato, the great thinker of antiquity. His divine imagination gave him a glimpse of truths which science has groped after for two thousand years. In his "Hymn of the Universe," which is the highest utterance, perhaps, that comes to us from the pre-Christian ages, he designates man as the "Microcosm," or epitome of the universe, thereby anticipating one of the sublimest generalizations of modern science.

Agassiz, the leading naturalist of our day, but re-echoed the thought of Plato, when he said, "Creation expresses the same thought from the earliest ages, onward, to the coming of man; whose advent is already foretold in the first appearance of the earliest fishes."

For creation, from the first, has been in continued effort to put forth the human form. Mineral, vegetable and animal forms, nay, atmospheres, planets, and suns, are nothing else than so many means and tendencies to man, on differing stages of his transit. He stands on the pyramid of being, linked with all below, as the form to which they all aspire. Man is the head and heart of nature. Creation is the coming and becoming of man. The world is, because he is. The reason of everything it contains is written in the book of human nature. He finds that reason physiologically in his body, and spiritually in his soul.

Man is the presence before whom all limits disappear, the reservoir out of which wholeness and vitality well from perennial springs. He is the organism that thinks. Upon molecular life which is the mineral, growth life which is the vegetable, and instinctive life which is the animal, is founded a life of life, which is mind. The face of man thus travels through the universe, and love and intelligence look out from things with an infinite variety, according to their capacities. He cannot travel beyond himself, for the world is still within the compass of his being. The heights of Zion and the

abysses of Hell are within him, and he is a pipe that runs with every wine. The living Caryatid is he—the *I am*, who not was, but is in all things. There is a oneness of principle pervading life, which resolves itself into the omniprevalence of man. The wise man recognizes his own species wherever life is seen; this is true to the very mire. Humanity enfolds everything and is all-embracing. The advent of man is the universe beckoning to the atom to come up among the stars.

"His eyes dismount the highest star;  
He is, in little, all the spheres."

All lower things are mute predictions of man. The sap of the tree foretells his blood, and the hoof of the quadruped prefigures his hand. Prior to all worlds man is the oldest idea in the creation. Nothing was ever moulded into form that was not a prophecy of something to be afterwards unfolded in him. In him unite zoophyte and fish, monad and mammal, and he confesses this in bone and function. The mouse is his fellow creature. The worms are his poor relations. Nothing walks, or creeps, or grows which he has not been in turn. The rock is man stratified; the plant, man vegetating; the reptile, man wriggling and squirming; to-morrow it will fly, walk or swim; the day after it will wear a neck-tie or a bonnet.

Our Psyche fits on and wears each coat in nature's wardrobe, before it assumes the human incarnation. Nature is in the ascensive mood. In her studio, the crystal tends to become an inflorescence. The fine floral activities, when freed from their leafy sheaths, collect to take on animal images, and the animal tends to the human image. The unconscious effort and aspiration of all lower life is to reach the human organism, that is implicated in the germ, and prefigured in the primal atom. Man is thus a universal form from the complex of creation, and the cosmos crosses him by its lines through every nerve.

The human body feeds from, and is fed by, the whole of matter. The plant assimilates the mineral, the animal digests the plant, and all pass into man. Above the lowest nature each thing is eater and meat. In the snake all the organs lie sheathed; no hand, feet, fins or wings. In fish, bird, and beast they are partly loosed and find some play. In man they are all freed, and full of action. The meanest animal does not stand isolated and forlorn. The brutes are kith and kin of those who rule over them. They are the steps of our ascending pathway through nature, and every lower form proffers its torch to light up some obscure chamber in the faculties of man. And the climb of creation is a constant one. Scales are con-

verted into feathers, gills into lungs, fins into hands, matter into force, atoms to thought, dust to brain, sap to soul. The universe runs manward from its source. Humanity, by its principles, extends through the realms of beasts and fishes, herbs and stones, and even through winds and the fluid worlds. There is no escape anywhere from man. If we fly to the uttermost parts of the earth on the wings of the morning; if we ascend into heaven or make our bed in Hades, still he is there.

Every madrepore and mollusk comes to its meridian through him, and to him, their end, all things continually ascend. He is animated oxygen, breathing granite, living clay. The planet itself has passed into man as bread into his body. There is nothing but is related to us, tree, sea shell, or crystal, the running river or the rustling corn; the roots of all things are in man. "He was pre-figured in the crystal and predicted in the plant. Prediction grew into prophecy in the reptile and bird. Prophecy became assurance in the ape. Assurance ripens into fulfilment in man." He is the high water mark of nature's tide. She speaks her latest organic word in him. God willed the whole immensity of his creation into a single point; that point is mankind.

"Man doth usurp all space,  
Stares thee in rock, bush, river, in the face.  
'Tis no sea thou seest in the sea,  
'Tis but a disguised humanity."

Science watches the monad through all his masks, and detects, through all the troops of organized forms, the eternal unity. All feet fit into that footstep, and all things have passed that way.

As man embodies nature, so does he reveal God, as the wave is a revelation of the sea. There is but one Man in cause, that One whom we term God; there is but one form of man, and that man the one mankind, grouped by families of races, throughout all spaces of the one immensity, and all linked in the chain of universal organic relations, without limit or end.

It was said, in the olden time, of the mythic Proteus that, to escape pursuit, he would assume all shapes. "First he became a lion with noble mane, then a dragon, and a leopard and a great bear and then he became liquid water and a lofty leaved tree." By Proteus the ancients symbolized man; for he is not only man; he is all things,—every part of the universe in turn, as we change our point of view. Through him the very trees are not inanimate, nor the beasts without progress, but they breathe and walk after man down the line of ages, as after Orpheus in the days of old....

And more or less bulk signifies nothing. The earth is but an astral atom. The atom may contain a globe. Infinitesimals are as huge as infinities. The world is wrapped up in the particle. The drop balances the sea. The sand grain is a masterpiece like the sun; the mite is mighty; and the mouse miraculous. The azure vault is but a floating islet of sun-crystals and star-crystals, knit together by the same chemic law that binds the grains of the pebble. In every cobweb there is room for a planet. Through the egg and the orb stream the same laws and the blood-globules in our veins dance to the same tune as asteroid and star....

In nature, the stone can never become a plant, but at a certain period in the planet's evolution, the plant grew out of the stone. Life is an evolution of recipient forms one after another, while each such life is sustained by momentary outpourings from the creative urn. Nature contains the forms and seeds of all life in potency, and brings them forth in orderly time, evolving these forms from protoplasm to man. In this way the primal slime becomes life, becomes fish, bird, mammal, man, philosopher; but all this life flows from the divine Life, through every ancestral link, and is God's, not man's really, from end to end. Nature streams perpetually from God; every atom even of her chaos is penetrated by an adequate mind; every granule is impeded and winged.

Life which is molecular in the mineral, growth in the plant, motion in the animal and consciousness in the man, has grown from more to more. The potential soul has climbed from worm to seer, through planet haze and lambent globe, through leaf and bud, from chaos to the dawning morrow. This world-energy that moves through all things, this universe-power, this God-force that in us wells up as consciousness, as will, as love, is the same force by which the worlds were made. We, and the divine on-working energy of the spheres, are one. The great call toward perfection which vibrates in man's soul, is the same as the impetus with which the entirety of nature swings forward toward completed being. The creation is uni-verse—turned into one, and forever thrilled through and through by the God!

Man is the true Joshua, who bridles the sun and curbs the moon. He has the planet for his pedestal. His brain is a magnet running out threads of relation through every clod and stone, acid and atom. The gases gather to compose his form, and the winds hold him in solution. Said a great teacher, "He knows of ox, mastodon, and plant, because he has just come out of them, and



part of the egg-shell still adheres. The plowman, the plow and the furrow are all of one stuff." . . .

Man is the Midgard-serpent in whom ends and beginnings meet, and who hoops the whole world round; and he is not only the rim and circumference of nature, but he is a spiritual world also, and a set of miracles, if he so chooses, binding all animalities to his will. Suns and stars, churches and states, are his ordinances, and their solidity is of him. Ages and epochs are his nursing mothers. He is the only Melchisedec, without beginning or end of days. He always was—in God; but he had to be created; that is, distanced from the Creator in order that he may be a personal existence. So he was wire-drawn through all forms, beginning at the bottom. He must rise from the ranks. He must individualize, by the long climb of evolution, to gain for that Personal Being fixity and place. He must be separated from the Creator by the whole breadth of the creation, and be veiled in matter. These lower forms are the basements to the Father's House of many mansions, the granite concrete under the temple of man. In itself the Psyche is an unbounded force, seeking perpetual expansion, ready to break out into a chaos of passion and will. It needs restraints to shape it into orderly development, and to endow it, at last, with self-control. The long series of molds or bodies through which it ascends, furnish this curbing power, compressing the action of the soul into specific channels. Man's spiritual destiny is so sublime; his final blending with the Divine so intimate and complete, that he needs all this preliminary experience of mineral, vegetable and animal existence, to give him the alphabet of self-consciousness, and to render him at last *solidaire* with God.

Our humanity has been evolved out of the lower and coarser types of life, and faces still hang out the sign of this experience in the eagle or vulture beak, the bull-dog visage, the swinish or wolfish aspect. They gravitate to animality. The brute peers forth through seeming manhood's face. "As the carnivora disappear from the forests they re-appear in our race. The ape and fox are in the drawing rooms, the lynx and the hyena haunt the courts of law, the wolf commands a regiment, the gorilla is the king." Animals are sentient structures in which the psychic germs, or human seed are moving on the rounds of their long pilgrimage toward the human incarnation. We have trodden in all these rounds before.

The present man has but stepped a little beyond the frontier of impersonal life. He is, as yet, but imperfectly and partially human, carrying much of the lime and slime of animalism on his shoulders.

The Present is rooted in the soil of the Past, and worthier æons build from ages gone. But slowly does the body forget its heredity. We have worked the tiger out of our teeth and nails, but he lingers in our passions. The mind is still toothed and fanged; the human hand retains the wild beast's claw; the human heart the beast's heart, with it blending. From the Saurian to Shakespeare is but a step.

Man is the true ark of Noah, in which all the lower natures are housed. He groups all the lesser material forms in his body, while he presages the higher life of the Spiritual in his soul. He is the Jacob's ladder, of many rounds, stretching from lowest earth to sky. He was the aim and dream of nature from the beginning. He was her target; but she did not hit the white till a million centuries had ripened her skill. Indeed she has not yet evolved the true and permanent type of humanity for which she has been striving. In her great workshop of the planet she has slowly felt her way; built and broken many a clay model; re-sketched and re-written her secret thought; till after a thousand millenniums man appears, note book in hand, and begins to ask of his origin. . . .

This earth of ours, that looks so fresh and sweet, is in fact an old graveyard,—a huge cemetery, one sepulchre, where we tread on skulls at every step. Our past burials strew the world. Its very soil is a concrete of dead organisms. The primeval oceans left a first deposit of their minute forms of life. The rivers tore the hillsides and ran down with their silt. The glacier with its blue plowshare deeply furrowed the landscape, and on the surface thus gained, the skies shed their rains, the ethers lent their thrill, and the mighty ferment of animate nature began.

Then came the slow, long, unceasing effort to evolve man; for he is a measureless presence, whose roots run out and down to every sweet and bitter thing, from the metal to the gas, from the violet to the vine. His body rolls along with the orb, kneaded together out of her juices and her clay. He is as much harnessed to matter as fish or dog, only with a larger arc. He stands waist deep in matter as in a swamp. He is glued to nature. He is caught, like the bedraggled fly, in the viscid fluidity of things. Both his feet branch down into roots that share the universal life, with the grass and the tree. He finds a bible in each daisy at the door. His heart beats in the slender pulsations of the jelly-fish. He has worn in his evolution the whole vesture of life, a vesture woven without seam from top to bottom, stretching from pit to pinnacle, from angleworm to angel, from sponge to spirit, from protoplasm to prophet! . . .

The tree is an unconscious person. It is an individual, and

knows it not. Man is such and knows it. Consciousness is the root of personality. The ideal, which in the lower organism is silent, becomes vocal and says: "I;" that I made religion and founded science; that I holds civilization in the one hand, and immortality in the other. The animal is tied hard and fast to his instincts. He cannot turn round in his track and face himself. But man's self detaches itself to look itself in the face. The animal while he knows, does not know that he knows. He does not think back over his own thoughts. He sees, but sees not that he sees. He acts, but does not react. His nature has no returning stroke; man alone has the faculty that looks before and after. He alone has spontaneity, and lower forms are but the stuttering prophecy of that unmatched perfection. God made man in his own image, and then he made the universe in the image of man...

Out of the lowliest forms man has come to be something, and will come to be much more. He is at the end of a long series of forms, through whose natural gradations he has passed, each stage of which has been towards a higher transformation. Providence was at every point of the long ascending way, and still pushes him on, for he is yet tethered to the soil whence his body came, and much earthly stratification loads the flesh of his heart. In the present stage of evolution we are but human animals who parade as men. Much of the human structure is a legacy from inferior organisms, which, in our next advent, we shall make superfluous...

The elimination of the body and spirit of the ego, the self life, from the structures of the human constitution, will be the outcome of the next wave of evolution. Altruism then becomes the law of human nature, and evil vanishes as a scroll. This is the coming of the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of Heaven, which Jesus announced and was, and which seemed to Him about to dawn upon the earth at that time; for the divine vision takes no note of time, and a thousand years are to it as one day. This will also be the woman's hour, when the legends of Eve and Pandora are replaced by a healthier scripture. It involves a new growth for the aged earth, a new nature teeming with lovelier and loftier races, and a new Genesis for man. None dream how fair man's coming state will be.