

THE UNITY OF NATURE

secondary, and tertiary epochs. According to a recent calculation, the first occupied at least thirty-four million, the second eleven million, and the third three million years. The history of the family of vertebrates, from which our own race has sprung, unfolds clearly before our eyes during this long period. Three different stages in the evolution of the vertebrate correspond to the three epochs; the *fishes* characterized the primary (palæozoic) age, the *reptiles* the secondary (mesozoic), and the *mammals* the tertiary (cænozoic). Of the three groups the fishes rank lowest in organization, the reptiles come next, and the mammals take the highest place. We find, on nearer examination of the history of the three classes, that their various orders and families also advanced progressively during the three epochs towards a higher stage of perfection. May we consider this progressive development as the outcome of a conscious design or a moral order of the universe? Certainly not. The theory of selection teaches us that this organic progress, like the earlier organic differentiation, is an inevitable consequence of the struggle for existence. Thousands of beautiful and remarkable species of animals and plants have perished during those forty-eight million years, to give place to stronger competitors, and the victors in this struggle for life were not always the noblest or most perfect forms in a moral sense.

It has been just the same with the history of humanity. The splendid civilization of classical antiquity perished because Christianity, with its faith in a loving God and its hope of a better life beyond the grave, gave a fresh, strong impetus to the soaring human mind. The Papal Church quickly degenerated into a pitiful caricature of real Christianity, and ruthlessly scattered