WHAT DOES HISTORY TEACH?: TWO EDINBURGH LECTURES

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JOHN STUART BLACKIE

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What does History teach?

Two Edinburgh lectures.

By

John Stuart Blackie.

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Blackie:

What does history teach?

PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following Lectures were prepared for the Philosophical Institution of Edinburgh, and were delivered, with the exception of a few passages, before audiences consisting of Members of that Institution on the evenings of 8th and 11th December in the present year.

EDINBURGH, *December*, 1885.

THE STATE.

I.

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Ὥσπερ τελεωθὲν βέλτιστον τῶν ζῴων ἄνθρωπος οὕτω καί χωρισθὲν νόμου καὶ δίκης χείριστον πάντων.
—ARISTOTLE.

HISTORY, whether founded on reliable record, or on monuments, or on the scientific analysis of the great fossil tradition called language, knows nothing of the earliest beginnings. The seed of human society, like the seed of the vegetable growth, lies underground in darkness, and its earliest processes are invisible to the outward eye. Speculations about the descent of the primeval man from a monkey, of the primeval monkey from an ascidian, and of the primeval ascidian from a protoplastic bubble, though they may act as a potent stimulus to the biological research of the hour, certainly never can form the starting-point of a profitable philosophy of history.

As revealed in history, man is an animal, not only generically different from, but characteristically antagonistic to the brute. That which makes him a man is precisely that which no brute possesses, or can by any process of training be made to possess. The man can no more be developed out of the brute than the purple heather out of the granite rock which it clothes. The relation of the one to the other is a relation of mere outward attachment or dependency—like the relation which exists between the painter's easel and the picture which is painted on it. The easel is essential to the picture, but it did not make the picture, nor give even the smallest hint toward the making of it. So the monkey, as a basis, may be essential to the man without being in any way participant of the divine indwelling λόγος which makes a man a man. The two are related only as all things are related, inasmuch as they are all shot forth from the great fountain-head of all vital forces, whom we justly call GOD.

The distinctive character of man as revealed in history is threefold. Man is an inventive animal, and he does not invent from a com-