

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: Ivan Greet's Masterpiece: The Missing Link

Date of first publication: 1893

Author: Grant Allen

Date first posted: May 22, 2013

Date last updated: May 22, 2013

Faded Page ebook #20130523

This ebook was produced by: David Edwards, Fred Salzer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

(This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive/Canadian Libraries)

THE MISSING LINK.

RICHARD HAWKINS was the Dimthorpe doctor. You've heard of Dimthorpe, no doubt—that stranded little village on the low Suffolk coast, bounded on the north by a salt-marsh, on the south by a sand-bank, on the right by a spreading East Anglian broad, and on the left by the wild waves of the German Ocean. As you tack along that flat shore, in a lumbering lugger, you see a faint streak of land and a squat church tower on your weather bow; and if you ask the Southwold skipper who navigates your boat what place that is, he'll answer you offhand, "Yon's the hill at Dimthorpe." He says it's a hill, you know, because it rises full eight feet high above sea-level at spring tides. Anywhere else in the world but in the Suffolk marshes, you'd laugh at the notion of calling that a hill. In Suffolk the wise man accepts elevations at the native estimate.

All the doctors who ever came to Dimthorpe before Richard Hawkins, had taken to drink; except one, his predecessor, and *he* took to opium-eating. There was nothing else for an educated man to do in the place, people said. Perhaps it was the lowness and dampness of that marshy islet, and the depressing climate. But anyhow, in the marshes, men begin with quinine, for their first six weeks, to ward off fever and ague; take next, after twelve months, to brandy or gin; and end, after a year or two, with injections of morphia. That's the regular round, if a man lives long enough; but most of them die off before they reach the opiate stage.

Richard Hawkins, however, was a religious man: a secretary of Young Men's Christian Associations and Bible Society Auxiliaries: so he took instead to the pursuit of science. He had taken to it, indeed, long before he bought the retiring opium-eater's practice at Dimthorpe. The Christian Young Men have a taste for magic lanterns and for the wonders of creation. They like to glance curiously at a creature under the microscope, and to say, as they pass on, with an unctuous air, "The handicraft of God is very marvellous." Early in life, therefore, Richard Hawkins undertook to supply that felt want of the Christian Young Men by Wednesday evening lectures. As a student, he had paid particular attention to botany, comparative anatomy, geology; as a full-fledged medical man, he managed to find time still in the intervals of his practice, for these favourite studies. He had an adamantine constitution, which enabled him to go his rounds all day in his dog-cart or on his short-legged cob, and to be up again, fossil-hunting in the crag pits by the river, at five o'clock next morning. A clean-shaven man, stubborn, pig-headed, conscientious, honest; the father of a family, blest with many twins, and ruling his own house well; one of those solid, stolid cast-iron Britons who know they're in the right, and will go to the stake gladly for their dearest prejudices rather than swerve an inch to the right or to the left from the path of truth as their eyes envisage it.

At Dimthorpe, Richard Hawkins gained universal respect. A doctor who didn't drink was indeed a novelty there. A doctor who served his turn in due time as churchwarden: a doctor who had means of his own, and paid his bills weekly: a doctor who lectured on the errors of Darwinism to the budding East Anglian grocer's assistant: a doctor who buttressed the tottering fabric of orthodoxy with magic-lantern slides, and combated the growing scepticism of this Erastian age with the two-edged sword of the Bible and Science—that was a rare treasure. The vicar congratulated himself on so useful an ally, though with an undercurrent of terror lest Dr. Hawkins should suggest more doubts than he laid, and should rouse by his apologies more questions than he answered, in the candid minds of the young ladies of Dimthorpe. For the young should be shielded from the very shadow of error.

But these are, alas! unbelieving days. Now, Dimthorpe was cursed with a very bad man—"a blaspheming cobbler," the mild-eyed curate called him—one Job Whittingham by name, a shrunken little creature, who took the *National Reformer* and the *Secularist* for his intellectual diet, and who had read wicked books by Colenso, Huxley, Spencer, and Tyndall. Nourishing his spare soul on these indigestible morsels, the cobbler in time waxed fat and kicked, intellectually speaking: for corporally, he was as lean and miserable as a scarecrow. He was a fearful radical too, folks thought, that cobbler: he feared neither squire nor parson, God nor devil. And therefore, at one of Richard Hawkins's Wednesday Evenings for the People—the Reverend the Vicar in the Chair as usual—he rose in his seat when all was done, and, humming and hawing somewhat in his native modesty, yet with much vehement oratory, as is the fashion of the British working-man when he speaks in public, he ventured, he said, 'umbly to call in question some of our learned lecturer's most 'ardy conclusions.

Richard Hawkins smiled. With that ample consciousness of intellectual superiority which the right use of the aspirate

always gives to an educated man, face to face with the objections of an uneducated opponent, he leaned with both hands on the little table before him, and ejaculated blandly in a very soft voice, "Which ones, pray? Which ones?"

"With Dr. 'Awkins's permission, sir," the cobbler answered sturdily, addressing himself with a fine sense of propriety to the vicar in the chair, "I would like to offer an observation or two on his cumulative argument against the animal origin of the 'uman species."

The vicar frowned faintly. This was just as he feared. When once you begin to reason about matters of faith, you open the floodgates of unbelief, and there's no knowing in what abysses of doubt you may be finally landed. (The vicar's metaphors were always rather exuberant than strictly consistent.) Besides, to give a common cobbler a chance of airing his infidel opinions at a public meeting was a thing not to be dreamed of. "I think, Whittingham," the vicar said coldly—it was a matter of principle with the vicar to keep the lower orders in that station in life to which,—and so forth; so he carefully abstained from addressing an unbelieving cobbler as *Mister* Whittingham: "I think any public discussion on these delicate questions is out of order at our meetings. If there are points on which you'd like Dr. Hawkins to instruct you further"—with a very marked stress upon the good word *instruct*—"you'd better inquire about them privately of him in the vestry—I mean, in his study—afterwards." For the vicar wasn't one to encourage brawling, nor did he think it seemly that an unwashed cobbler should be heard in the assembly before the faces of his superiors.

Richard Hawkins, however, was made of other mould. Unlike the vicar, he had no sneaking undercurrent of terror in his inmost soul lest the religion of his fathers might be worsted and laid low in a hand-to-hand encounter with a journeyman shoemaker. A good man and true, he trusted his own cause, and he leapt into the fray as a knight armed at all points might leap upon the defenceless body of his Paynim assailant. He loved fair play; he loved free speech; he loved to see every man have a right to his opinion. And besides, he knew well he could crush that cobbler to earth in a second with the dead weight of his knowledge, his learning, his logical faculty.

"I think, Mr. Chairman," he interposed, still bland, still smiling his condescending smile, and fingering his smooth chin, "if Mr. Whittingham will state his objections to my views outright, I may be able here and now to dispel his difficulties."

The vicar's face was black. The vicar's eye was glassy. He shuffled uneasily in his chair of office. "As you will, Dr. Hawkins," he answered, without attempting to conceal his grave disapproval. In the doctor's own house, even the priest of the parish could hardly prevent the doctor from letting his guests have their say if they would. But it was certainly unseemly that he, a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England, should be presiding over a meeting where an unbelieving cobbler was allowed to vent his vulgar infidelity unchecked before the faces of his betters. Still, politeness too has its laws. *Noblesse oblige*. Against his better judgment, the vicar bowed to his host's decision.

Then the cobbler, still swaying there awkwardly in his Sunday clothes, and waiting in some anxiety for the chairman's leave, with his head craned forward, and his little black eyes screwed up inquiringly under his projecting eyebrows,—the cobbler, I say, fell to with a will upon his destructive argument. He orated, of course—the British workman is nothing if not oratorical; his one idea of a speech is to declaim, full-mouthed; rhetoric is to him the soul of debate; he warms up as he goes, and launches forth, fiercely vehement. Dust pours from the slapped thighs of his Sunday trousers. But still, for all that, the cobbler pressed his professional opponent hard in argument. He combatted the doctrine, he said, of any distinct creation of the 'uman species. He believed, with 'Erbert Spencer, in the principles of evolution and gradual development. He saw no necessary limits imposed by nature on the action of them laws. They were eternal, all-pervading, inevitable, self-acting. Warming up with his subject as he went, he proceeded to quote from memory in very long screeds what 'Uxley had said of man's place in nature. He appealed to Darwin, he appealed to 'Ackel, he appealed even to the partially adverse opinions of Mr. Awlfred Russel Wallace. He showed how shallow and sophistical, how devoid of solid basis, were the arguments advanced by Dr. 'Awkins against them. He demolished Dr. 'Awkins, indeed, with anatomy and physiology, with phylogeny and embryology, with the gorilla and the chimpanzee, with *ar priory* reasoning and *ar posteriory* facts. It was a triumphant vindication. The cobbler waxed warm over it, and mopped his bald forehead more than once by the way with the corner of his best red silk pocket-handkerchief.

But the audience—well, the audience just stared and tittered. In their well-bred ignorance—for most of them belonged to the local gentry and professional classes of the mud-bank islet—they felt the genial tolerance of superiority for the cobbler's facts and the cobbler's theories. It was nothing to them that Job Whittingham knew ten thousand times more about the question at issue than any one of themselves did. It was nothing to them that his logic was acute and his reasons

convincing; nothing that his knowledge, though second-hand, was really in its way both wide and accurate. The man dropped his h's; that was quite enough for Dimthorpe. What science can you expect from the lips of a man who misplaces the very letters of the English alphabet? As Job grew warmer, and mopped his face more vigorously, the audience tittered louder at each absentee aspirate. As he finished, the chartered wag of Dimthorpe turned round to the vicar's second daughter with a broad smile on his face, and suggested in an audible aside that to judge from the speaker's words the Missing Link of 'umanity was the letter 'H.'

Then Richard Hawkins, never heeding these rude allusions, but with the sweet smile of superiority on his smug clean-shaven face, rose once more from his seat, and expanding his white shirt-front with obtrusive respectability, addressed himself in the calm and courteous tone of the experienced lecturer to the Reverend the Chairman. That was a crushing answer. As the cobbler afterwards described it in a conversation with a friend, 'Awkins pounced down upon him like an 'awk; he was simply scarified. Not that the doctor could really reply to any one of his unlearned opponent's cogent arguments; but the doctor's aspirates were as firm as a rock, and the doctor's delivery was after the manner of a man who demonstrates to a beginner well-ascertained certainties. "I ain't a-arguin' with you," said a public-house orator one day to a foolish objector; "I'm only a-tellin' of you." And Richard Hawkins didn't argue either; he only told Job Whittingham where and how he was in error. Against Huxley and Darwin, the lecturer quoted with impressive effect (raising his voice as he spoke) that great and venerated anatomist, Sir Richard Owen; and the audience, thrilling to the title, as in duty bound, felt instinctively that just as a member of the Royal College of Physicians is a better authority on science than a common cobbler, so a professor who had received the dignity of knighthood at the hands of most sacred majesty itself, must be a better authority on comparative anatomy than a brace of plain misters. It stood to reason, of course, that the Queen must know best on a question of abstruse scientific opinion.

In short, Richard Hawkins beat down his cobbler antagonist by sheer dint of authority and of social position. It was white-tie and swallow-tail against Sunday suit; it was academical English against sound common sense and quaint homespun rhetoric, with no h's to boast of.

As soon as the doctor had wagged his forefinger for the last time at a demonstrative period, the chairman, still wriggling uneasily in his chair, but with a pleasing consciousness that orthodoxy had now been amply vindicated, dissolved the meeting at once without waiting for Job Whittingham. The right of final reply, he said, rested always with the lecturer. That was a rule of debate. Dr. Hawkins had replied. We would now adjourn, and meet again in this place on Wednesday fortnight: subject, The Evidences supplied by the Geological Record as to the Authenticity and Truth of Holy Scripture.

And for the next three days nobody talked of anything at the tea-tables of Dimthorpe, except the cheek of the cobbler, and the way Dr. Hawkins had banged the breath out of his body. He hadn't a leg to stand upon, the mild-eyed curate opined—not a leg to stand upon; he was simply extinguished.

But Job Whittingham went away, scratching what hair remained on his shock-headed poll, and feeling vaguely conscious that in spite of the doctor's long words—his crushing allusions to the *hippocampus major* and the *flexor pollicis longus*—Darwin and Huxley were right after all, and Richard Hawkins was but a shallow middle-class sciolist. It was his ample shirt-front that had carried the day. "A working-man ain't got no chance," Job remarked to himself, with philosophic resignation, "agin the respectability and the social presteedge of the black-coated classes. That's just where it is, don't you see? He ain't got no chance agin 'em."

It was on Saturday of that week that Richard Hawkins, going his rounds on foot in the poor part of the town, saw one of Job Whittingham's eight starveling youngsters sitting on the doorstep of the cobbler's house; for though the radical philosopher was in theory a stalwart Malthusian, in practice his quiver was very full of them. The boy was sucking a bone, which immediately attracted the doctor's trained attention. It wasn't a fresh bone, and it had no trace of meat on it. But the thing that made Richard Hawkins give a start of surprise at sight of it was the fact that—not to mince matters too fine—the bone was human. His anatomical eye told him that in a moment. The second or middle joint of a human forefinger!

He drew back, astonished. Not that there was here any faint flavour of romantic cannibalism. The bone, though human, was old and long buried. His interest in it was antiquarian and scientific, not living and medical. No suspicion of murder about this strange relic; No case of infanticide and back-garden interment. With facts like those, Richard Hawkins was only too familiar. He knew the ways of the poor and the evils of illegitimacy. But this bone was dry, very antique,

thoroughly mineralized. He took it from the boy sharply, and looked hard at it awhile with the naked eye. Ha! what was this? Why, traces of crag on the sides and knuckle! Now, crag is the loose red Pliocene deposit of the hill at Dimthorpe; and as every geologist or antiquary knows, it antedates by many, many thousands of years the supposed first appearance of man on our planet. If the bone really came from a layer of the crag—Richard Hawkins drew back in unspeakable horror. He didn't even dare to formulate to himself his instinctive conclusions.

If the bone really came from the crag, then the age of man on the earth must be pushed back a couple of million years at least, to the Pliocene time—and Heaven only knows what might be the remote consequences to the cause of orthodoxy.

“Where did you get this finger, boy?” he asked the lad sharply.

And little Ted, looking up, made answer with a jerk of his thumb over his right side, “Down yon: by Wood's crag-pit.”

“Dug it out?” the doctor asked in a very short voice.

And the boy nodded assent. “Dug it out there,” he answered.

The doctor put the bone in his pocket hurriedly, gave the boy a ha'penny—for he was a saving man—and walked away to the next patient's house, much perturbed and preoccupied. He could hardly attend to the symptoms in the case—a mere ordinary development of acute brain-fever, in the stage of collapse—so interested and excited was he by that momentous question. What did it matter, in fact, whether one more poor old woman lived or died, when the whole fabric of theology, the whole future hopes of the human race, trembled tottering in the balance?

As soon as he decently could, he got away from his patients, home by himself, and, locking the door of the consulting-room, as often happened when people had to be examined, he took out his little platyscopic lens, and gazed long and anxiously at that tell-tale forefinger. Fragments of crag were embedded on it all round. It was to some extent mineralized by removal of bony particles and their replacement through filtration of iron compounds. Richard Hawkins peered at it in blank dismay. If this were indeed a bone of Pliocene date—then the whole fabric of his philosophy must topple over, helter-skelter, in one awful collapse, from base to copingstone.

But no! Impossible! Incredible! The thing couldn't be. By sure and certain warranty of Holy Scripture, he knew it wasn't so; he knew it; he *knew* it. Man was fashioned direct, in the shape that we see him, by the finger of the Creator (whatever that may mean), without any Missing Link or other intermediate developmental form between himself and the soulless anthropoids. The bone must have been buried by accident in the crag, or deliberately interred there in ancient British times, and must have got mineralized in a comparatively short period by the action of water. To-morrow morning he would go and examine the crag-pit. Till then, he'd put the bone back safe in his waistcoat pocket.

But he felt uneasy about it, all the same, for the rest of the day; that uncanny fragment! how annoying of it to come in with its disturbing implications, to upset the snug edifice of his cut-and-dried system! Bones shouldn't be allowed to get craggy like that! They should be kept in their place; they should be retained on the surface; they should be confined entirely to their proper strata. As the vicar with Job Whittingham, so the doctor with that digital.

That evening the vicar called round for an amiable chat with Dr. Hawkins in his private study. The twins never came there, and he could see his friend quietly. They had a cigar together, and discussed the last lecture. The doctor was more positive that night than ever. He gazed at the illustrative casts of mammalian skulls in the cabinet opposite—man's, the gorilla's, the chimpanzee's, the gibbon's—and remarked complacently that for his part he pinned his faith on Specific Distinctions. If ever the affiliation of Man on the Anthropoid Apes became a Proved Fact, then he didn't see how they could any longer resist the plain conclusion: on the special creation of man rested the Immortal Soul; and with the Immortal Soul went the whole complex system of orthodox theology.

The vicar, on the other hand, holding his coffee half sipped, was far more cautious and far less dogmatic. It didn't do, the vicar thought, for Christian men to base their faith too much upon any particular scientific or mere human opinion. Facts might be too strong for them in the end, any day, and they might have to reconsider their ideas and eat their own words, if they spoke too positively. “Remember how we stuck at first to the six literal days of creation,” the vicar said softly, twirling two fat thumbs upon his ample knee. “And we had to give them up after all. We had to go back upon it. Geology taught us they were only six epochs. For my part, Hawkins, if I were you, I wouldn't lay so much stress upon any one

mode of interpreting scripture—especially Genesis. Genesis is a *vary* hard nut to crack. While insisting strongly on the general close correspondence between the book of God and the book of nature, I wouldn't tie myself down to any special theory as to the *mode* of the coincidence between them—wouldn't nail a particular little flag to my mast, and pledge myself before the world to stand or fall by it." For the parson was one of those prudent men who believe in the saving grace of hedging. The vicarage of Bray would exactly have suited him. He took his stand, of course, on the Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture: but he insisted that no one individual fragment of it had any necessary connection with the stability of the entire structure.

Richard Hawkins, however, with his scientific ideas, and his logical intellect, would hear of no such paltering with eternal and immutable Truth. More orthodox than the parson, he hated these latitudinarian views. "No, no," he said with warmth, fingering the bone in his pocket uneasily as he spoke: "I can't admit that. I won't play fast and loose with the plain words of the Book. If God made man in His own image, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life on the Sixth Day of Creation, then I can understand all the rest: the Immortal Soul; Free Will; the Plan of Salvation; the difference that marks us off from the lower animals; the existence within us of a divinely-sent conscience. But if ever it can be shown conclusively, shown beyond the shadow of a doubt, we're descended from an ape, then I give up all. We can be nothing more than the beasts that perish. For at what point in the series of evolving monkeys can the Immortal Soul first come in? How can we ever say where the ape leaves off, and the man begins? Once admit the existence of a continuous chain of life, and you abandon the citadel. Either man is created in the image of God, or else he is a direct descendant of the monkey, the lizard, the ascidian, the jelly-fish. What is true of them is true also of him. The soul, the conscience, eternal life, depend entirely on direct creation."

The vicar knocked off his ash pensively, and perused his boots. Logically, he had nothing to answer to the doctor's argument; but practically, he knew in his own soul that if evolutionism were to prove man's animal origin beyond the shadow of a doubt to-morrow morning, he'd stick to the vicarage of Dimthorpe still, and debate as hotly as ever at the diocesan synod over apostolic succession and the eastward position. So he held his peace, like a wise man, and stared hard at the fireplace.

All that night long, Richard Hawkins hardly slept a wink. The bone was indeed a bone of contention to him. Early in the morning, he rose up betimes, and betook himself in the grey dawn to the crag-pit by the river. Mrs. Hawkins, the mother of many twins, was little surprised at his eccentric movements. A doctor's wife is accustomed to night alarms. She took it for granted he was called up to attend some patient.

Sunday morning though it was—no fit day for fossilizing—Richard Hawkins began to peer about in the pit, to see if he could find any trace of the owner of the forefinger. He wasn't long in discovering it. It was easy enough to find. His heart stood still within him as he gazed at the spot. A hand half protruded from the face of the cutting, where the workmen had left it exposed without ever discovering it. Or perhaps Ted Whittingham had grubbed it out after they went away from their work for the evening. The doctor's practised eye took in the facts at once. A significant glance at the lie of the strata told him this was indeed no ancient British interment. All the beds were undisturbed. The skeleton, if there was one, lay there *in situ*.

A few minutes' work succeeded in convincing him there was a skeleton. Egging away with his knife at the soft stone, he gradually unearthed a palm and fore-arm. He started afresh at the sight. Human, no doubt; yes, distinctly human! But how curiously proportioned, too! How unusually shaped! How strangely ape-like!

As he looked, a vague horror came over him suddenly. Why, this was an accursed thing, a work of the devil! He saw what it all meant already, and shrank from it with a deadly shrinking, an unspeakable repugnance. His first impulse, indeed, was to cover it all up, and rush away from the spot, and let the unclean thing remain buried for ever. But what use would that be? In a day or two's time, the workmen would reach it as they dug, and all England would ring with the hateful discovery. Second thoughts told him better. This was the Lord's doing. How lucky it was Sunday! Thank Heaven, in England, we remember the sabbath day to keep it holy still! The workmen wouldn't come to dig it out to-day. And how lucky it was a Christian who had first discovered it! In an agony of haste, he wrenched the fore-arm and wrist from the crag with a jerk, and wrapped them up with care in his white silk pocket-handkerchief. Then he turned and fled from that unhallowed pit. All the devils in hell hooted after him in derision.

That morning, Richard Hawkins didn't go to church. He was in no humour for prayer. He locked himself up in his own

study, and sat examining those hateful bones with minute anatomical care. The more he looked at them, the less he liked them. Gratiolet's plates lay open by his side. He compared the things with the normal skeleton in his cabinet—much to their disadvantage. Human; yes, human; undoubtedly human; but oh, how ape-like in effect, how intermediate in character! They were ghastly in their reminiscence of the great anthropoids. No Hottentot or Bushman was one twentieth so simian.

How he got through the day, he hardly knew. Dinner time came, and he ate his food mechanically. But horrible thoughts surged and seethed in his soul. The universe was tottering to its centre that day. The cosmos stood tremulous on the brink of an abyss. God himself was being weighed in the balance, and perhaps found wanting. The existence of order, creation, a deity, depended upon the undisclosed remainder of that hateful skeleton. If the rest was as monkey-like as the fragment he had unearthed, then the Bible was a lie; the Creator was a dream; religion was a figment; the universe rolled black down the ages to hell: there never was, there never had been, a God its ruler.

So Richard Hawkins thought. Perhaps he thought right. Perhaps he thought wrong. But at any rate, he thought so. Too logical to palter with petty reconciliations, he stood by his guns manfully in this last extremity. He had erected for himself early in life a well-rounded philosophy, a system of things; and on that system he had based himself through all the years of his manhood. On the Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture he had taken his stand. Now a moral earthquake shook and assailed that Rock. It trembled before his very eyes. If it staggered and fell, the solid ground would have failed beneath him. He had no place left in which to lay his head. Hell yawned open beside him. He must plunge into it and be satisfied.

Yet, born man of science that he was for all that, he could never be untrue to the Facts, could never ignore Evidence. Though that skeleton were to overthrow his God and his philosophy at once, he must unearth it still: he must find out the Truth: let it cost what it might, he must stand even with Realities. At nine o'clock he rose, and took out his lantern. His wife looked astonished. "Where are you going, Richard?" she asked. And for the first time in his life, that perturbed and troubled soul told her guiltily a deliberate lie. "A midwifery case," he answered, shuffling. "Poor woman out Ness way. I mayn't be back till morning."

And he went out by himself towards the crag-pit by the river.

It rained hard that night, but for hours he stood there in the cold and wet, digging away with all his might, digging feverishly, madly. At all hazards, he must dig out that accursed thing. Never should it affront an innocent world with its godless face. Never should it laugh its mute laugh at purity and goodness. No workman should unearth it, and exhibit it in a glass case at the British Museum. If it was all that he feared, no human eye but his own should ever behold the atheistical grin on its mocking skull. He alone should pass through that fiery furnace. He alone should know by positive proof his Bible a lie and his God a delusion.

Two million years ago, some black and hairy creature, shambling along half erect on crouching knees through the woodland, had been suddenly carried away by a wild rush of water from a bursting tree-dam, and, after one hideous yell of rage and despair, had been drowned and buried in sand on the spot that is now the Hill at Dimthorpe. Alone among his kind, his skeleton was thus preserved, by the pure accident of geology, for our age to look upon. Richard Hawkins had discovered the one surviving specimen of the ancestor of man, as he roamed the dense woods of a Pliocene Britain.

Bit by bit he uncovered the thing—head, foot, trunk, shoulders. In the dark and under the rain, by the dim light of his lantern, he could hardly form any just anatomical opinion upon its form and affinities. But he saw quite enough even so to know his worst fears were hideously confirmed. With the energy of despair—the energy of a man who works body and soul against fearful odds to save the community from some unknown cataclysm, Richard Hawkins dug on, all heedless of rain and cold and darkness. His one terror was now lest any man should come up before dawn and interrupt him. That *he* should have learned that ghastly secret of the rocks was bad enough in all conscience: but that all the world should know it, and sink into the hopeless slough of infidelity and vice,—that was more than Richard Hawkins could bear to contemplate.

At last he finished his task. Every bone of the entire skeleton was there, unbroken. He thrust the precious fossils carefully into his sack, extinguished his lantern, and trudged wearily home through the rain, a disillusioned unbeliever.

Any other discoverer with half Richard Hawkins's scientific knowledge would have gone home rejoicing that he had found the most wonderful geological relic ever unearthed on the surface of our planet. But to Richard Hawkins, the whole episode envisaged itself quite otherwise. The iron of the Young Men's Christian Association had entered into his soul. For years he had preached, with all the solid, stolid, square-headed logic of his British middle-class mind, that morality, decency, the well-being of our race depended absolutely upon the religious life, and that the religious life depended absolutely upon implicit acceptance of the Bible story as he himself interpreted it:—and was he going now to turn back upon the creed of a lifetime, merely because he found the facts of the world had gone against him? Never, never, never! Nobly consistent in his way, Richard Hawkins admitted himself fairly beaten. The book of nature and the book of God, contrary to all belief, were plainly at variance. There *was* no God; there *was* no Immortal Soul: infidelity and vice had things all their own way: one moral shone clear from that evening's bad work—Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die! Let us wallow, if we would be logical, in the foul sty of licentiousness!

He had preached it so long, he had reiterated it so often, that he firmly believed it himself. If only the world knew what he carried in his bag, the world would in twenty-four hours from that time be a seething mass of sin like Sodom and Gomorrah.

With such thoughts surging fiercely in his feverish brain, he reached his home at last, let himself in with his latch-key, and deposited the sack in his own study. It was three in the morning, and he was wet to the skin. But the internal heat of a great disillusion kept him fiery hot in spite of it. Most men would have grown cold with it: Richard Hawkins went feverish. He took out the bones and examined them one by one. That skull—oh, how horrible! how loathsome! how disgusting! Human, human; vaguely, prophetically human: room for large hemispheres in it, a thinking brain; but what a low-browed scowl, what huge bony ridges over the deep-set eyes, what a massive lower jaw, what savage and snarling canines! The creature that owned that head-piece was a man in intelligence—of the lowest and most degraded Digger Indian type—but a brute in moral sense, in fiendish cruelty, in fierce fighting instincts, in ungovernable passions. Richard Hawkins reconstructed the fellow mentally for himself at a single glance—a peering, scowling, hairy-browed, heavy-jawed, shambling, scurrying, long-limbed savage—a bully all fists and tusks and brutal battles with his kind—a transmitter of the ape into the veins of what we had fondly hoped was rather the archangel ruined.

Richard Hawkins hid his face in his hands, not sobbing, but mute and horror-struck. Then he was an ape himself, and if he did as he ought to do on his own frequent showing, he should go straight upstairs, garden hatchet in hand, and dash out the brains of Mary and the children. Must he stultify himself before the faces of the Christian Young Men? Must he go back on his own oft-repeated philosophy?

Slowly he rose, after a long pause for thought, and lighted a huge fire in the study grate. His mind was made up now. He knew just what to do. Duty shone clear as a lamp before him. It was destroying the Evidence, to be sure. Well, never mind for that! There *was* no God. There *was* no Immortal Soul. But Heaven forbid the world should ever find it out through him. The words of Holy Scripture rang still in his ears—the words of that divine, that delusive Book on which he had pinned his life-long faith in vain—“It were better for that man that a millstone were fastened round his neck and he were cast into the sea.” Let the universe roll on down its godless course; let fortuitous atoms clash and clang for ever in unholy strife; but he at least, Richard Hawkins, would be guiltless of disclosing the loathsome secret. Not on *his* head would the blood of humanity rest. He would save society still from the demon of Atheism.

There *was* no God: but what of that? what of that? The world, the world could never get along without Him. We must believe in Him still, even though He be not. Why, he himself, Richard Hawkins, one solitary man, was left wholly rudderless before the blast by that accidental discovery. And how could the whole race survive the disillusion? Should he let loose rapine and uncleanness and massacre upon the earth, to go about like raging lions, seeking whom they might devour, by telling the hideous truth to babes and sucklings? Perish the thought! Far sooner than that, he would go down quick into the pit himself, and let the conscious earth close over him in silence.

One by one, he thrust the dry bones of the only specimen of Pliocene man into the fire, remorselessly. He stirred them with the poker, like the devils in some mediæval Italian hell. He watched them crumble. He gloated over their destruction. Those atheistical fossils, doubly damned, had destroyed his peace of mind, and would have destroyed the world's, but for his own active and prompt intervention. In that burning fiery furnace, heated seven times hot, they mouldered away to ashes. As the last of them disappeared, he drew a deep breath. Religion was saved! The Bible might still be accounted true. Infidelity couldn't stalk triumphant through the land. Our wives and daughters might yet live pure

and good. He had deserved well of the State. He had rescued humanity.

It was all a vast Lie, a triumph of priest-craft. But they would believe it still. They wouldn't stand out in the dark and cold as he did. Dark! why, the universe rolled black as pitch before him! Cold! why, not a ray of sunshine from heaven came to warm up anywhere its chilly expanse. He shuddered to realize it. There *was* no God; and the world was a vile cock-pit of jarring elements.

Well, well; he had done his duty to his kind, and after that he could go. "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." Ah me, the irony of it! His eyes had beheld, not salvation, but the downfall of all hope, all faith, all charity. Profoundly religious to the core, as he understood religion, Richard Hawkins couldn't consent to live any longer in a godless and polluted world. He had found it all out. Henceforth it was no fit home for him. Born an heir of the Kingdom, he couldn't endure to abjure his birthright and dwell now for a brief space in the tents of iniquity.

But he had one more duty to perform before he went hence. The cobbler! Job Whittingham! For duty was still the polestar of that wrecked and sinking bark. Like an honest man that he was, and a sincere Christian, Richard Hawkins must allow when he was fairly beaten. As soon as day broke, he rose once more from his chair, let himself silently out, and walked along the cold grey streets to the cobbler's doorstep.

There, he knocked and waited. The cobbler, half-dressed, let him in, and yawned. Richard Hawkins's face was as white as a sheet. "Good Lord, sir, what's the matter?" the cobbler asked, half terrified.

"Matter enough," Richard Hawkins answered in a hollow voice, sinking heavily into a seat. His coat was still damp, and his eyes were haggard. "Whittingham, I argued against you the other day at my lecture, that man couldn't possibly be descended from an ape-like ancestor. Well, since then, I've had positive proof that's not the truth. Man *is* descended after all from a monkey—a hideous, grinning, leering, horrible monkey. I know it. I've seen it. With my own very eyes I've found it all out.... You were right.... I was wrong.... As a Christian man, I've come to-day to acknowledge it."

The cobbler stared hard at him. Was Dr. 'Awkins mad? "Wy, wot's made yer change yer mind?" he asked at last, much wondering.

"No matter," Richard Hawkins answered, with lips like death. "I've had reason to change. That's enough for us two. Whittingham, this morning I stand before you, an atheist like yourself. But not a contented one. I can't live so, for long. It's impossible, unhuman. I know now there's no God. To-night in the long watches I've found God out. But I can't do without Him. For in Him, as the apostle truly says, we live and move and have our being."

The cobbler stared still harder. What strange mixture of faith and unbelief was this? His working-man mind couldn't fathom it at all. The despair of a wrecked system was too deep for his plummet to sound. "I don't see what you're a-drivin' at," he blurted out bluntly.

Richard Hawkins drew his hand across his brow like one stunned. "I dare say not, my friend," he answered, in the voice of a man who speaks in a dream. "I dare say not. But I mean it for all that. I mean it, every word of it. I couldn't bear to die without coming to acknowledge my change of view to you. I feel I wronged you. And I ought to have recanted as openly as I spoke. I ought to have made you a public restitution. If I wrong any man in ought, I would wish, like Zacchæus, to repay him twofold. But I can't, I can't. For the sake of a groping world, of all those good innocent Christian souls who still believe, as I did, I haven't the heart to do it. I haven't the heart to disillusion them. And I ask you yet one thing, my friend. For God's sake—though there *is* no God—but, there! one says it instinctively—for God's sake, speak not a word of this episode to anybody. Whittingham, you don't know what it costs me to make such a confession—to deny my God: to proclaim myself an atheist. Lock it up in your own soul! Say no syllable to any one."

The cobbler, screwing up his small face, and peering eagerly out at him, took in by degrees the fact that his visitor's heart was stirred to the profoundest depths,—and had pity upon him. "I will say not a word, sir," he answered, after a moment's hesitation.

Richard Hawkins grasped his hand, rose in solemn silence, and staggered out once more. At the door he paused again. "No God! No God!" he cried, nodding his head twice or thrice and half turning a second time to the astonished cobbler. Then he went out into the street, his hat in his hand, and walked hurriedly homeward. After all, why debate? All was

well at home. Mary was provided for: the children wouldn't want. Of what use was he now in the world—that godless world? He couldn't bear the weight of such a secret for years and years. Any day he might blab. And ten drops of Prussic acid would end all so easily!

In his own study, he knelt down and prayed earnestly, fervently, to the God that never was, that never had been. You can't conquer in a day the habits of a lifetime. Then he unlocked his medicine chest, and took from it a phial.

The jury brought it in “temporary insanity,” of course. People said, much learning had made him mad, like Paul. He had worked too hard at once at science and his profession.



Transcriber's Note

This text has been preserved as in the original, including archaic and inconsistent spelling, punctuation and grammar, except that obvious printer's errors have been silently corrected.

[The end of *The Missing Link* by Grant Allen]