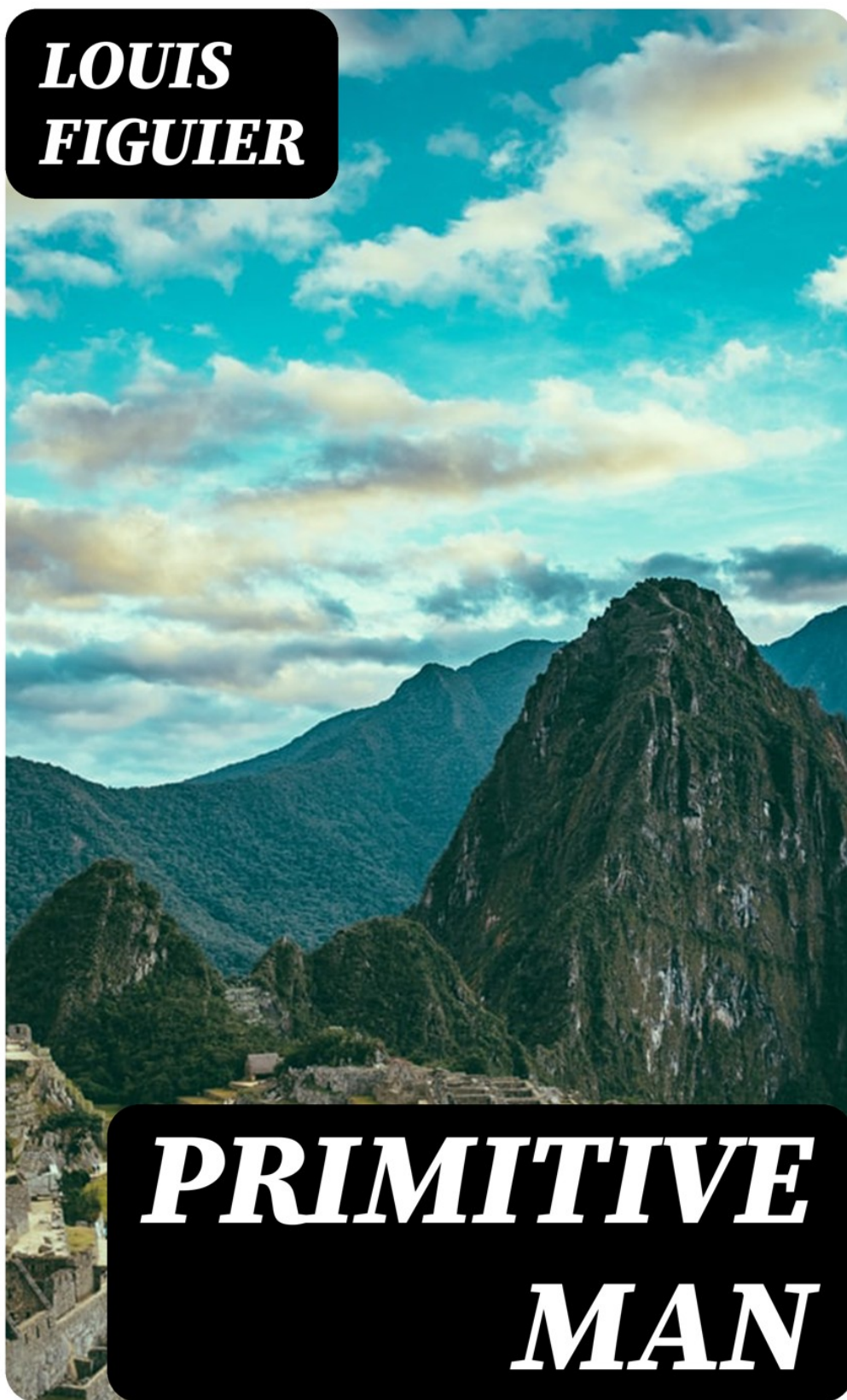




***LOUIS  
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***PRIMITIVE  
MAN***

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***PRIMITIVE  
MAN***

**Louis Figuier**

# **Primitive Man**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

[LIST OF PLATES.](#)

[CHAPTER I.](#)

[CHAPTER II.](#)

[CHAPTER III.](#)

[CHAPTER IV.](#)

[CHAPTER I.](#)

[CHAPTER I.](#)

[CHAPTER II.](#)

[CHAPTER III.](#)

[CHAPTER I.](#)

[CHAPTER II.](#)

[CHAPTER III.](#)

[CHAPTER IV.](#)

[CHAPTER V.](#)

[CHAPTER VI.](#)

[CHAPTER VII.](#)

[CHAPTER VIII.](#)

[CHAPTER I.](#)

[CHAPTER II.](#)

[PRIMITIVE MAN IN AMERICA.](#)

[CONCLUSION.](#)

[ALPHABETICAL INDEX](#)



# LIST OF PLATES.

Table of Contents



FIG.		PAGE
	A Family of the Stone Age (Frontispiece).	
1.	Human Jaw-bone found at Moulin- Quignon, near Abbeville, in 1863.	18
2.	Skull of a Man belonging to the Stone Age ( <i>The Borreby Skull</i> ).	27
3.	Skull of the Gorilla.	28
4.	Skull of the Orang-Outang.	ib.
5.	Skull of the Cynocephalus Ape.	29
6.	Skull of the <i>Macacus</i> Baboon.	ib.
7.	The Production of Fire (whole page engraving).	
8.	<i>Dendrites</i> or Crystallisations found on the Surface of wrought Flints.	46
9.	Section of a Gravel Quarry at Saint-Acheul, which contained the wrought Flints found by Boucher de Perthes.	47
10.	Hatchet of the <i>Almond-shaped</i>	48

type from the Valley of the  
Somme.

- |     |   |     |
|-----|---|-----|
| 11. | Flint Hatchet from Saint-Acheul of<br>the so-called <i>Almond-shaped</i><br>type.   | 49  |
| 12. | Wrought Flint ( <i>Moustier</i> type).  | ib. |
| 13. | Flint Scraper.  | 50  |
| 14. | Flint Knife, found at Menchecourt,<br>near Abbeville.   | ib. |
| 15. | Flint Core or Nucleus.  | 51  |
| 16. | Man in the Great Bear and<br>Mammoth Epoch (whole page<br>engraving).   |     |
| 17. | The First Potter (whole page<br>engraving).   |     |
| 18. | Fossil Shells used as Ornaments,<br>and found in the Gravel at<br>Amiens.   | 54  |
| 19. | Theoretical Section of a Vein of<br>Clay in the Carboniferous<br>Limestone, <i>before</i> the hollowing<br>out of Valleys by Diluvial Waters. | 56  |
| 20. | Theoretical Section of the same<br>Vein of Clay converted into a<br>Cavern, <i>after</i> the hollowing out of<br>Valleys by Diluvial Waters.  | 57  |

21.	The Cave of Galeinreuth, in Bavaria.	59
22.	Section of the Sepulchral Cave at Aurignac.	62
23.	Flint Knife, found in the Sepulchral Cave at Aurignac.	63
24.	Implement made of Reindeer's or Stag's Horn, found in the Sepulchral Cave at Aurignac.	ib.
25.	Series of Perforated Discs of the <i>Cardium</i> Shell, found in the Sepulchral Cave at Aurignac.	64
26.	Fragment of the Lower Jaw of a Cave-Bear found in the Sepulchral Cave at Aurignac.	ib.
27.	Upper Molar of a Bison found in the Ashes of the Fire-Hearth of the Sepulchral Cave at Aurignac.	65
28.	Arrow-head made of Reindeer's Horn, found in the Sepulchral Cave of Aurignac.	66
29.	Bodkin made of Roebuck's Horn, found in the Sepulchral Cave of Aurignac.	ib.
30.	Truncated Blade in Reindeer's Horn bearing two Series of transversal Lines and Notches, probably used for numeration.	67

31. Funeral Feast during the Great Bear and Mammoth Epoch (whole page engraving).
32. Carved and perforated Canine Tooth of a young Cave-Bear. 69
33. Head of a Cave-Bear found in the Cave of Aurignac. 70
34. Head of the *Rhinoceros tichorhinus*, found in the Cave of Aurignac. ib.
35. Head of a great Stag (*Megaceros hibernicus*), found in the Cave of Aurignac. 71
36. Sketch of the Great Bear on a Stone, found in the Cave of Massat. 75
37. Portion of the Skull of an Individual belonging to the Epoch of the Great Bear and the Mammoth, found in the Cave of Engis. 80
38. Portion of the so-called Neanderthal Skull. ib.
39. Man of the Reindeer Epoch (whole page engraving).
40. Rock-Shelter at Bruniquel, a supposed Habitation of Man



during the Reindeer Epoch (whole page engraving).

- |     |   |     |
|-----|---|-----|
| 41. | A Feast during the Reindeer Epoch (whole page engraving).                                       |     |
| 42. | Flint Bodkin or Stiletto for sewing Reindeer Skins, found in the Cave of Les Eyzies (Périgord). | 92  |
| 43. | Bone Needle for Sewing.   | ib. |
| 44. | The Canine Tooth of a Wolf, bored so as to be used as an Ornament.                              | 93  |
| 45. | Ornament made of the bony part of a Horse's Ear.  | ib. |
| 46. | Spear-head, found in the Cave of Laugerie-Basse (Périgord).                                     | 95  |
| 47. | Worked Flint from Périgord (Knife).   | 96  |
| 48. | Worked Flint from Périgord (Hatchet).   | ib. |
| 49. | Chipped Flint from Périgord (Knife).  | 97  |
| 50. | Chipped Flint from Périgord (Scraper).  | ib. |
| 51. | Small Flint Saw, found in the Rock-Shelter at Bruniquel.  | 98  |
| 52. | The Chase during the Reindeer Epoch (whole page engraving).                                     |     |

53.	Barbed Arrow of Reindeer Horn.	99
54.	Arrow of Reindeer Horn with Double Barbs.	ib.
55.	Animal Bone, pierced by an Arrow of Reindeer Horn.	100
56.	Tool made of Reindeer Horn, found in the Cave of Laugerie-Basse (Stiletto?).	ib.
57.	Tool made of Reindeer Horn, found in the Cave of Laugerie-Basse (Needle?).	ib.
58.	Spoon of Reindeer Horn.	101
59.	Knuckle-bone of a Reindeer's Foot, bored with a hole and used as a Whistle.	102
60.	Staff of authority, in Reindeer's Horn, found in the Cave of Périgord.	ib.
61.	Another Staff of authority in Reindeer's Horn.	ib.
62.	A Geode, used as a Cooking Vessel(?), found in the Cave of La Madelaine (Périgord).	103
63.	Earthen Vase, found in the Cave of Furfooz (Belgium).	104
64.	Sketch of a Mammoth graven on	106

a Slab of Ivory.

- |     |  |            |
|-----|--|------------|
| 65. | Hilt of a Dagger carved in the Shape of a Reindeer.  | 107        |
| 66. | Representation of a Stag drawn on a Stag's Horn.   | 108        |
| 67. | Representation of some large Herbivorous Animal on a Fragment of Reindeer's Horn.                            | <i>ib.</i> |
| 68. | Arts of Drawing and Sculpture during the Reindeer Epoch (whole page engraving).                              |            |
| 69. | Representation of an Animal sketched on a Fragment of Reindeer's Horn.                                       | 109        |
| 70. | Fragment of a Slab of Schist bearing the representation of some Animal, and found in the Cave of Les Eyzies. | <i>ib.</i> |
| 71. | A kind of Harpoon of Reindeer's Horn carved in the Shape of an Animal's Head.                                | 110        |
| 72. | Staff of Authority, on which are graven Representations of a Man, two Horses, and a Fish.                    | 111        |
| 73. | Skull, found at Furfooz by M. Édouard Dupont.  | 114        |
| 74. | Skull of an Old Man, found in a  | 115        |

*Rock-shelter at Bruniquel.*

- |     |  |     |
|-----|--|-----|
| 75. | A Funeral Ceremony during the Reindeer Epoch (whole page engraving). |     |
| 76. | Man of the Polished-stone Epoch (whole page engraving).              |     |
| 77. | Bone Skewers used as Fish-hooks.                                     | 134 |
| 78. | Fishing-net with wide Meshes.  | 136 |
| 79. | Stone Weight used for sinking the Fishing-nets.                      | ib. |
| 80. | Fishing during the Polished-stone Epoch (whole page engraving).      |     |
| 81. | Flint Knife from one of the Danish Beds.                             | 138 |
| 82. | Nucleus off which Knives are flaked.                                 | ib. |
| 83. | Flint Hatchet from one of the Danish Beds.                           | ib. |
| 84. | Flint Scraper from one of the Danish Beds.                           | ib. |
| 85. | Refuse from the Manufacture of wrought Flints.                       | 139 |
| 86. | Weight to sink Fishing-nets.   | ib. |
| 87. | Danish Axe of the Polished-stone Epoch.                              | 140 |

88.	Double-edged Axe.	ib.
89.	Danish Axe-hammer drilled for handle.	141
90.	Ditto.	ib.
91.	Spear-head from Denmark.	142
92.	Ditto.	ib.
93.	Toothed Spear-head of Flint.	143
94.	Flint Poniard from Denmark .	ib.
95.	Type of the Danish Arrow-head .	ib.
96.	Another Type of Arrow-head.	ib.
97.	Arrow-head.	144
98.	Arrow-head from Denmark.	ib.
99.	Flint Chisel from Denmark.	ib.
100.	Small Stone Saw from the Danish Deposits.	145
101.	Another Stone Saw from Denmark.	ib.
102.	Bone Harpoon of the Stone Age, from Denmark.	ib.
103.	Bone Comb from Denmark.	146
104.	Necklace and various Ornaments of Amber.	ib.

105.	Nucleus in the Museum of Saint-Germain, from the Workshop of Grand-Pressigny.	148
106.	Polisher from Grand-Pressigny, both faces being shown.	150
107.	The earliest Manufacture and Polishing of Flints (whole page engraving).	
108.	Polisher found by M. Leguay.	154
109.	Spear-head from Spiennes.	158
110.	Polished Jade Hatchet in the Museum of Saint-Germain.	159
111.	Polished Flint Hatchet with a Sheath of Stag's Horn fitted for a Handle.	161
112.	Flint Hatchet fitted into a Stag's-horn Sheath having an Oak Handle, from Boucher de Perthes' Illustration.	162
113.	Hatchet Handle made of Oak.	163
114.	Stag's-horn Sheath open at each end, so as to receive two Hatchets.	ib.
115.	Polished Flint Hatchet, from Belgium, fitted into a Stag's-horn Sheath.	ib.



116.	Gardening Tool made of Stag's Horn (after Boucher de Perthes).	164
117.	Ditto.	ib.
118.	Ditto.	165
119.	Flint Tool in a Bone Handle.	166
120.	Flint Tool with Bone Handle.	<i>ib.</i>
121.	Ornamented Bone Handle.	ib.
122.	Necklace made of Boars' Tusks longitudinally divided.	167
123.	Flint Knife from the Peat Bogs near Antwerp.	168
124.	Primitive Corn-mill.	170
125.	The Art of Bread Making in the Stone Age (whole page engraving).	
126.	The Earliest Navigators (whole page engraving).	
127.	The Earliest regular Conflicts between Men of the Stone Age; or, The Entrenched Camp of Furfooz (whole page engraving).	
128.	Flint Arrow-head from Civita-Nova (Italy).	180
129.	The Borreby Skull.	182

130.	Danish <i>Dolmen</i> .	185
131.	<i>Dolmen</i> at Assies (department of Lot).	ib.
132.	<i>Dolmen</i> at Connéré (Marne).	186
133.	Vertical Section of the <i>Dolmen</i> of Lockmariaker, in Brittany. In the Museum of Saint-Germain.	ib.
134.	<i>Tumulus-Dolmen</i> at Gavr'inis (Morbihan).	187
135.	A Portion of the <i>Dolmen</i> of Gavr'inis.	ib.
136.	General Form of a covered Passage-Tomb.	188
137.	Passage-Tomb at Bagneux, near Saumur.	ib.
138.	Passage-Tomb at Plauharmel (Morbihan).	189
139.	Passage-Tomb, the so-called <i>Table de César</i> , at Lockmariaker (Morbihan).	ib.
140.	A Danish <i>Tumulus</i> or chambered Sepulchre.	190
141.	Usual Shape of a <i>Menhir</i> .	191
142.	The Rows of <i>Menhirs</i> at Carnac.	ib.
143.	<i>Dolmen</i> with a Circuit of Stones	192

(*Cromlech*), in the Province of  
Constantine.

- |      |  |     |
|------|--|-----|
| 144. | Group of Danish <i>Cromlechs</i> .   | ib. |
| 145. | Position of Skeletons in a Swedish<br>Tomb of the Stone Age.               | 194 |
| 146. | A <i>Tumulus</i> of the Polished Stone<br>Epoch (whole page engraving).    |     |
| 147. | A Founder's Workshop during the<br>Bronze Epoch (whole page<br>engraving). |     |
| 148. | Section of the <i>Ténevière</i> of<br>Hauterive.                           | 220 |
| 149. | A Swiss Lake Village of the Bronze<br>Epoch (whole page engraving).        |     |
| 150. | Vertical Section of a <i>Crannoge</i> in<br>the Ardakillin Lake.           | 230 |
| 151. | Vertical Section of the <i>Marniera</i> of<br>Castione.                    | 233 |
| 152. | Floor of the <i>Marniera</i> of Castione.                                  | 234 |
| 153. | Plan of the Piles and Cross-beams<br>in the <i>Marniera</i> of Castione.   | ib. |
| 154. | The Chase during the Bronze<br>Epoch (whole page engraving).               |     |
| 155. | Stone Hatchet from the<br>Lacustrine Habitations of<br>Switzerland.        | 241 |

156.	Stone Chisel with Stag's-horn Handle, from the Lacustrine Habitations of Switzerland.	241
157.	Flint Hammer fitted with a Stag's-horn Handle.	242
158.	Stone Hatchet with Double Handle of Wood and Stag's Horn.	ib.
159, 160.	Serpentine Hatchet-Hammers from the Lacustrine Habitations of Switzerland.	243
161.	Another Hatchet-hammer from the Lacustrine Habitations of Switzerland.	ib.
162.	Flint Saw fitted into a Piece of Stag's Horn.	244
163.	Flint Spear-head from the Lacustrine Settlements of Switzerland.	ib.
164.	Various Shapes of Flint Arrow-heads from the Lacustrine Settlements of Switzerland.	ib.
165.	Arrow-head of Bone fixed on the Shaft by means of Bitumen.	245
166.	Stone Arrow-head fixed on the Shaft by means of Bitumen.	ib.
167.	Arrow-head fixed on the Shaft by	ib.

a Ligature of String.

- |      |   |     |
|------|---|-----|
| 168. | Bone Bodkin, from the Lacustrine Habitations of Switzerland.                          | 246 |
| 169. | Ditto.  | ib. |
| 170. | Carpenter's Chisel, from the Lacustrine Habitations of Switzerland.                   | ib. |
| 171. | Bone Needle.  | ib. |
| 172. | Pick-axe of Stag's Horn.  | 247 |
| 173. | Harpoon made of Stag's Horn, from the Lacustrine Habitations of Switzerland.          | ib. |
| 174. | Ditto.  | ib. |
| 175. | Vessel made of Stag's Horn.   | ib. |
| 176. | Bronze Winged Hatchet, from the Lacustrine Habitations of Switzerland.                | 249 |
| 177. | Winged Hatchet (front and side view), from the Lacustrine Habitations of Switzerland. | ib. |
| 178. | Socketed Hatchet, from the Lacustrine Habitations.                                    | ib. |
| 179. | Knife Hatchet (front and side view) from the Lacustrine Habitations.                  | ib. |

180.	Carpenter's Chisel, in Bronze.	250
181.	Hexagonal Hammer.	ib.
182.	Knife with a Tang to fit into a Handle, from the Lacustrine Settlements of Switzerland.	ib.
183.	Socketed Knife, from the Lacustrine Settlements of Switzerland.	251
184.	Bronze Sickle, found by M. Desor at Chevroux.	ib.
185.	Bronze Fish-hook, from the Lacustrine Settlements of Switzerland.	252
186.	Double Fish-hook, from the Lacustrine Settlements of Switzerland.	ib.
187.	Hair-pin, found by M. Desor in one of the Swiss Lakes.	253
188.	Ditto.	ib.
189.	Hair-pin with Cylindrical Head.	ib.
190.	Hair-pin with Curled Head.	ib.
191.	Bronze Bracelet, found in one of the Swiss Lakes.	254
192.	Another Bronze Bracelet.	255
193.	Bronze Ring.	ib.



194.	Bronze Pendant, from the Lacustrine Habitations of Switzerland.	256
195.	Another Bronze Pendant, from the Lacustrine Habitations of Switzerland.	ib.
196.	Bronze Ring, from the Lacustrine Habitations of Switzerland.	ib.
197.	Another Ornamental Ring.	ib.
198.	Earthenware Vessel with Conical Bottom, from the Lacustrine Habitations of Switzerland.	259
199.	Earthen Vessel placed on its Support.	ib.
200.	Fragment of an Earthen Vessel with a Handle.	259
201.	Vessel of Baked Clay, from the Lacustrine Settlements of Switzerland.	260
202.	Ditto.	ib.
203.	Cloth of the Bronze Age, found in the Lacustrine Settlements of Switzerland.	262
204.	The First Weaver (whole page engraving).	
205.	Spindle-whorls, made of Baked	263

Clay, found in the Lacustrine  
Settlements of Switzerland.

- |      |   |     |
|------|---|-----|
| 206. | Principal Designs for the<br>Ornamentation of Pottery during<br>the Bronze Epoch. | 264 |
| 207. | The Cultivation of Gardens during<br>the Bronze Epoch (whole page<br>engraving).  |     |
| 208. | A Feast during the Bronze Epoch<br>(whole page engraving).                        |     |
| 209. | Bronze Sword in the Museum of<br>Neuchâtel.                                       | 272 |
| 210. | Bronze Dagger, found in one of<br>the Swiss Lakes.                                | ib. |
| 211. | Bronze Spear-head, found in one<br>of the Swiss Lakes.                            | 273 |
| 212. | Bronze Arrow-head, found in a<br>Lacustrine Settlement of<br>Switzerland.         | ib. |
| 213. | Scandinavian Sword.   | 274 |
| 214. | Hilt of a Scandinavian Sword.   | ib. |
| 215. | Mode of fixing the Handle to a<br>Scandinavian Hatchet.                           | ib. |
| 216. | Another Mode of fixing the<br>Handle to a Scandinavian<br>Hatchet.                | ib. |

217.	Danish Bronze Knife of the Bronze Epoch.	275
218.	Ditto.	ib.
219.	Blade of a Danish Razor of the Bronze Epoch.	276
220.	Woollen Cloak of the Bronze Epoch, found in 1861, in a Tomb in Denmark.	277
221.	Woollen Shawl, found in the same Tomb.	ib.
222.	Woollen Shirt, taken from the same Tomb.	278
223.	First Woollen Cap, found in the same Tomb.	ib.
224.	Second Woollen Cap, found in the same Tomb.	ib.
225.	Bronze Comb, found in the same Tomb.	ib.
226.	Warriors during the Bronze Epoch (whole page engraving).	
227.	Bronze Hatchet Mould, found in Ireland.	279
228.	Stone Crescent, found in one of the Swiss Lakes.	280
229.	Skull found at Meilen, Front View.	289

230.	Skull found at Meilen, Profile View.	ib.
231.	Primitive Furnace for Smelting Iron (whole page engraving).	
232.	Bronze Coin, from the Lake of Neuchâtel.	310
233.	Sword, from the Tombs of Hallstadt (with a Bronze Hilt and Iron Blade).	313
234.	Ditto.	ib.
235.	Dagger, from the Tombs of Hallstadt (Bronze Handle and Iron Blade).	314
236.	Ditto.	ib.
237.	Funeral Ceremonies during the Iron Epoch (whole page engraving).	
238.	A Skeleton, portions of which have been burnt, from the Tombs of Hallstadt.	315
239.	A Necklace with Pendants, from the Tombs of Hallstadt.	316
240.	Bracelet, from the Tombs of Hallstadt.	317
241.	Ditto.	ib.
242.	Bronze Vase, from the Tombs of	ib.

	Hallstadt.	
243.	Bronze Vase, from the Tombs of Hallstadt.	317
244.	Warriors of the Iron Epoch (whole page engraving).	
245, 246.	Fore-arm encircled with Bracelets, found in the Tombs of Belleville (Savoy).	319
247.	Iron Sword, found in one of the Swiss Lakes.	321
248.	Sword with Damascened Blade, found in one of the Swiss Lakes.	ib.
249.	Sheath of a Sword, found in one of the Swiss Lakes.	322
250.	Lance-head, found in one of the Swiss Lakes.	323
251.	Head of a Javelin, found in the Lacustrine Settlement of La Tène (Neuchâtel).	324
252.	The Chase during the Iron Epoch (whole page engraving).	
253.	Square-socketed Iron Hatchet, found in one of the Lakes of Switzerland.	325
254.	Sickle.	ib.
255.	Scythe, from the Lacustrine	326

## Settlements of Switzerland.

- |      |   |     |
|------|---|-----|
| 256. | Iron Point of Boat-hook, used by the Swiss Boatmen during the Iron Epoch. | ib. |
| 257. | Horse's Bit, found in the Lake of Neuchâtel.                              | ib. |
| 258. | <i>Fibula</i> , or Iron Brooch, found in the Lake of Neuchâtel.           | 327 |
| 259. | Iron Buckle for a Sword-belt, found in the Lake of Neuchâtel.             | 328 |
| 260. | Iron Pincers, found in the Lake of Neuchâtel.                             | ib. |
| 261. | Iron Spring-scissors, found in the Lake of Neuchâtel.                     | ib. |
| 262. | Razor.  | 329 |
| 263. | Agriculture during the Iron Epoch (whole page engraving).                 |     |



# PRIMITIVE MAN.

## [Table of Contents](#)

### INTRODUCTION.

FORTY years have scarcely elapsed since scientific men first began to attribute to the human race an antiquity more remote than that which is assigned to them by history and tradition. Down to a comparatively recent time, the appearance of primitive man was not dated back beyond a period of 6000 to 7000 years. This historical chronology was a little unsettled by the researches made among various eastern nations—the Chinese, the Egyptians, and the Indians. The *savants* who studied these ancient systems of civilisation found themselves unable to limit them to the 6000 years of the standard chronology, and extended back for some thousands of years the antiquity of the eastern races.

This idea, however, never made its way beyond the narrow circle of oriental scholars, and did nothing towards any alteration in the general opinion, which allowed only 6000 years since the creation of the human species.

This opinion was confirmed, and, to some extent, rendered sacred by an erroneous interpretation of Holy Writ. It was thought that the Old Testament stated that man was created 6000 years ago. Now, the fact is, nothing of the kind can be found in the Book of Genesis. It is only the commentators and the compilers of chronological systems who have put forward this date as that of the first

appearance of the human race. M. Édouard Lartet, who was called, in 1869, to the chair of palæontology in the Museum of Natural History of Paris, reminds us, in the following passage taken from one of his elegant dissertations, that it is the chronologists alone who have propounded this idea, and that they have, in this respect, very wrongly interpreted the statements of the Bible:

"In *Genesis*," says M. Lartet, "no date can be found which sets a limit to the time at which primitive mankind may have made its first appearance. Chronologists, however, for fifteen centuries have been endeavouring to make Biblical facts fall in with the preconceived arrangements of their systems. Thus, we find that more than 140 opinions have been brought forward as to the date of the creation alone, and that, between the varying extremes, there is a difference of 3194 years—a difference which only applies to the period between the commencement of the world and the birth of Jesus Christ. This disagreement turns chiefly on those portions of the interval which are in closest proximity to the creation.

"From the moment when it becomes a recognised fact that the origin of mankind is a question independent of all subordination to dogma, this question will assume its proper position as a scientific thesis, and will be accessible to any kind of discussion, and capable, in every point of view, of receiving the solution which best harmonises with the known facts and experimental demonstrations." [\[1\]](#)

Thus, we must not assume that the authority of Holy Writ is in any way questioned by those labours which aim at

seeking the real epoch of man's first appearance on the earth.

In corroboration of M. Lartet's statement, we must call to mind that the Catholic church, which has raised to the rank of dogma so many unimportant facts, has never desired to treat in this way the idea that man was created only 6000 years ago.

There is, therefore, no need for surprise when we learn that certain members of the Catholic clergy have devoted themselves with energy to the study of pre-historic man. Mgr. Meignan, Bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne, is one of the best-informed men in France as respects this new science; he cultivates it with the utmost zeal, and his personal researches have added much to the sum of our knowledge of this question. Under the title of 'Le Monde et l'Homme Primitif selon la Bible,'[\[2\]](#) the learned Bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne published, in 1869, a voluminous work, in which, taking up the subjects discussed by Marcel de Serres in his "Cosmogonie de Moïse, comparée aux Faits Géologiques,"[\[3\]](#) and enlarging upon the facts which science has recently acquired as to the subject of primitive man, he seeks to establish the coincidence of all these data with the records of Revelation.

M. l'Abbé Lambert has recently published a work on 'L'Homme Primitif et la Bible,'[\[4\]](#) in which he proves that the discoveries of modern science concerning the antiquity of man are in no way opposed to the records of Revelation in the Book of Moses.

Lastly, it is a member of the clerical body, M. l'Abbé Bourgeois, who, more a royalist than the king—that is, more

advanced in his views than most contemporary geologists—is in favour of tracing back to the tertiary epoch the earliest date of the existence of man. We shall have to impugn this somewhat exaggerated opinion, which, indeed, we only quote here for the sake of proving that the theological scruples which so long arrested the progress of inquiry with regard to primitive man, have now disappeared, in consequence of the perfect independence of this question in relation to catholic dogma being evidently shown.

Thanks to the mutual support which has been afforded by the three sister-sciences—geology, palæontology, and archæology,—thanks to the happy combinations which these sciences have presented to the efforts of men animated with an ardent zeal for the investigation of the truth;—and thanks, lastly, to the unbounded interest which attaches to this subject, the result has been that the limits which had been so long attributed to the existence of the human species have been extraordinarily extended, and the date of the first appearance of man has been carried back to the night of the darkest ages. The mind, it may well be said, recoils dismayed when it undertakes the computation of the thousands of years which have elapsed since the creation of man.

But, it will naturally be asked, on what grounds do you base this assertion? What evidence do you bring forward, and what are the elements of your proof?

In the following paragraphs we give some of the principal means of examination and study which have directed the efforts of *savants* in this class of investigation, and have