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THE PRESENT STATUS OF EVOLUTIONARY FAITH

STRANGE as it may seem, most scientists to-day regard evolution as a closed question. The majority of them see no reason whatever even for discussing a subject which they deem settled long ago, and they are inclined to be impatient and resentful at those who persist in making evolution a subject of controversy. They became convinced of the truth of evolution thirty years ago, and using evolution as an assumption, proceeded to construct a number of sciences such as biology, geology, anthropology, etc., which to-day can hardly be taught on any other basis than that of the assumption of the truth of evolution.

In fact, it may almost be said that the correlation and systematisation of facts bearing on the theory of evolution stopped with Herbert Spencer, for when the scientific world accepted evolution, there seemed no longer any reason to waste time proving it. With the development of scientific specialisation, the evolutionary systematist became an anachronism, and since it was no longer possible for a man to be an authority on *all* the sciences bearing on evolution, scientists ceased to attempt to correlate or to criticise the discoveries of colleagues in branches concerning which they had no first-hand knowledge.

With the advance in the technique of the microscope, even biology became too vast a field for one man to master in detail, and the various specialists found their time so largely taken up with detailed investigations that they actually had no time for investigation of discoveries outside their own special fields. Though facts bearing on the question of evolution were continually being discovered, for the most part they remained *unrelated* facts, for there was no great systematist, like Darwin, to show their relation to the evolutionary theory. Of course, parts of the theory of evolution had to be remodelled, but no one dreamed of abandoning the principle of evolution itself, for it had become an integral part of all these sciences so that abandoning it would be almost like abandoning the sciences themselves.

The natural result of this general scientific attitude was that any re-examination of the evidence for evolution itself became practically impossible. It seemed almost like questioning the multiplication table, or like examining the evidence for the roundness of a circle! Each student of science, hearing evolution taught as unquestioned truth on all sides, naturally grew up an evolutionist, and if he became sufficiently interested in any branch of science to make a specialty of it, soon became so engrossed in his detailed investigations that he had no time or inclination to question the principle itself.

During the last two decades, however, a remarkable phenomenon has occurred. Gradually, item by item, the original Darwinian theory of the Origin of the Species has been abandoned as a *cause* of evolution¹, and as new discoveries in cytology and genetics became generally known there occurred a subtle change in the teaching of the theory of evolution itself. While many scientists like Sir Arthur Keith still call themselves Darwinians, and still try to cling to the Darwinian theory², scientists as a group have abandoned Darwinism. Darwin's name, it is true, is still lauded, and his great service to science still praised by the majority of scientists. They believe in evolution as firmly as ever, but in place of the old confidence and assertiveness that natural selection was the sovereign explanation of all the problems connected with the origin of species, there is now only ambiguity of statement and vagueness of thought, with increasing agnosticism as to the *causes* of the evolution which they all believe in. Even the old definitions of evolution are giving way to new ones like the following: "Embryology further shows that evolution is not invariably an advance from lower and simpler to higher and more complex types, but may be by way of degeneration, and degradation."³ In contrast to Le Conte's famous definition that "Evolution is continuous progressive change, according to certain laws and by means of resident forces,"⁴ the evolution of scientific opinion is striking, to say the least! If evolution has come to mean going backward or downward as well as going forward or upward, then almost anyone to-day can be an evolutionist! The Bible

¹ L. T. Moore: *Dogma of Evolution*.

² W. B. Scott: *Theory of Evolution*.

³ W. B. Scott: *Theory of Evolution*.

⁴ Le Conte: *Evolution and its Relation to Religious Thought*.

doctrine of the fall of man would be right in line with such "evolution"!

If embryologists have, as Professor Scott says, proved that evolution may be by way of *degeneration*, then however much evolution may still remain as the fundamental principle of geology and biology, nothing could be plainer than that there needs to be a complete re-examination of the evidence for evolution itself, for how can it any longer be claimed that all life has evolved from a single cell or group of cells by means of resident forces? Why may not the alternative, and certainly more plausible, explanation that the forms of life in the world to-day represent a *degeneration from the originally created* forms of life, be accepted even by evolutionists themselves? Evolutionists can still call that evolution if they desire, but if they define evolution as sometimes occurring "by way of degeneration" they have in reality accepted the logical possibility of special creation of the species originally!

Statements like the one quoted above from Professor Scott might lead the uninformed observer to think that perhaps the belief in evolution itself was disintegrating, but as a matter of fact the idea of evolution is still as firmly entrenched in the scientific mind as ever. It is only the *logic* of the belief that has been abandoned. Since the famous address at Toronto delivered by the late Professor Bateson a few years ago, which Professor Osborn deplored as likely to lead laymen in science astray, the majority of scientists have adopted the position which Professor Bateson then stated so frankly as that of *faith* in the *fact* of evolution having occurred, but ignorance or agnosticism as to the *causes* which have brought it about.¹ Vernon Kellogg voices what is probably the concensus of scientific opinion when he says: "But—let me repeat—because the biologists do not know, or only partially know, the causes of evolution, to assume from this that they have any doubts at all of the reality of evolution, would be to assume what is not true. I do not know of a single living biologist of high repute—and I do not determine repute on a required basis of belief in evolution!—who does not believe in evolution as a proved part of scientific knowledge."² From this it appears that we find science in the strange position of falling back on *faith in the dogma* of evolution, after

¹ *Science*, N. S., Vol. LV, No. 1412.

² Kellogg: *Evolution, The Way of Man*.

all attempts to unravel the mystery of the causes which brought it about have ended in failure! A careful examination of the various possible causes will make it clear, just what a sheer venture of blind faith this is; but the point we are calling attention to now is that there is almost no division of opinion among scientists on two points: (1) that evolution is a fact, and (2) that no explanation of the causes which are alleged to have produced it has been, or can be, accepted by scientists of the present date. Darwinism is dead, Sir Arthur Keith and the Bishop of Birmingham to the contrary notwithstanding. It served the valuable (according to the evolutionists) purpose of convincing the scientific world of the fact of evolution, but now has to be abandoned as a theory of explanation of the causes of evolution. And though Darwinism is dead, alas, no other explanation has taken its place! Mendelism, mutations and what not, have all been examined, accepted in part or in total, and yet rejected as adequate explanations of the causes of evolution. Even the dead corpse of the theory of "acquired characters" was galvanised into an appearance of life by the late Professor Kammerer (who committed suicide when he discovered that someone had falsified the photographic plates of the salamander upon which he depended to prove that acquired characters were inherited) and Pavlov¹, only to be discarded as hopeless by most modern biologists. In short, all *possible* causes have been carefully investigated, and one by one abandoned as real explanations of evolution. Evolutionists conceal this fact even from themselves, and still cling to the delusion that some day, somehow, a cause adequate to have brought about evolution will be discovered. They seek to convey the impression that there are numerous possible causes of evolution which have not been thoroughly investigated, so that it is only a question of time and patient research before the definite causes of evolution will be discovered. What they are concealing, oftentimes even from themselves, is the fact that *all* possible causes of evolution have *already* been examined and one by one discarded. If evolution was not produced by any one of the possible causes now known to science, or by any combination of those causes, then *no* cause could have produced it, for there are simply *no other causes* to be investigated. Evolutionists still speak in the vaguest terms of the way in which water animals "acquired" the habit of spending

¹ Kellogg: *Evolution, The Way of Man.*

part of their time on land between the tides, on some mud flat, until at last they "developed" lungs, as though all that was necessary to bring forth the lungs was the *need* for lungs! Every biologist, except possibly the few who still cling to the delusion that acquired characteristics can be inherited, will admit that such statements have no basis in biological facts, and can only be asserted in blind, unreasoning faith. The mechanism of mutations and of Mendelian changes amply accounts for all inheritance factors, but there is no way in which a *new* characteristic, such as lungs, could ever enter the evolutionary chain except by special creation which they deny. Any factor which is present as a gene on one of the chromosomes may lie dormant for some time, until by a "cross-over" (to adopt a convenient phrase) it is brought into the somatoplasm (i.e. the cells of the body, not the germ cells) and appears externally as a mutation, but unless present originally in the chromosomes, *there is no way in which it can get in from without*. Mutations such as those above mentioned occur in a certain fixed ratio, in nature, and can be definitely calculated in advance, for the *Drosophila* for example, but these mutations always are produced by the *loss* of certain genes present in the ancestors (usually, if not always, through a "cross-over"), and never by the *addition* of new factors.

It has been claimed recently that this process can be speeded up by exposing the germ plasm to X-rays, so that the mutations which have to be waited for patiently in nature can be artificially produced by the effects of X-rays almost at will.¹ In announcing the discovery of this fact the statement was made that it was the process of evolution that was speeded up. This, of course, is directly opposite from the fact, for it is *devolution*, or degeneration that is speeded up, not *evolution*, if by evolution is meant progressive changes, with the production of new and more complex organisms.

The fact is, as has been stated above, that every possible cause has actually been examined and found wanting. Nothing now known to science could have produced evolution, and there is nothing left to examine. Yet strange to say, instead of abandoning evolution, or re-examining the alleged evidence for evolution, scientists fall back on *faith*! They say that they still *believe* in the fact of evolution, though they do not know what could have produced it!

¹ *Science*, N. S., Vol. LXVII, No. 1728.

Now to the outsider, this situation seems ridiculous. In fact, were the whole subject not so closely entwined with moral and religious implications, the scientific attitude toward evolution would be amusing. After so many scientists for so long a time have ridiculed as unscientific the Christian's faith in the Word of God as a divine revelation and have spurned miracles as contrary to natural law, all because we believe that God can control nature and can intervene in nature whenever He desires, to find these same scientists depending upon *faith* to prove evolution is interesting, to say the least!

In any other phase of human activity, if all possible causes which might have produced a thing have been examined, investigated, and abandoned as explanations, were the thing in question an intangible theory, the evidence in its support would begin to be seriously examined and questioned. Why are not scientists doing the same thing in regard to evolution? If there are no known causes which might have produced evolution, why is not the fact of evolution having occurred brought out into the light of day and given a careful re-examination? To the outsider this would seem the natural and inevitable thing to be done, but it is not done by the scientists themselves. One is reminded of a banker whose funds and credit are exhausted, yet who keeps a bold front before the world, and becomes even more vociferous in proclaiming the solidity of the bank when that solidity is challenged by sceptics.

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