

A few words on the origin of species, as very generally accepted in the scientific world, may not be without interest. I can only give a meagre outline of the general principles :—

“A few great naturalists, previous to the time of Darwin, struck by the very slight differences between many species of animals, and the numerous links existing between the different forms, and also observing that a great many species do vary considerably in their form, color and habits, conceived the idea that they all might be produced one from the other. The most distinguished of these writers was the great French naturalist Lamarck, who published an elaborate work, “*Philosophie Zoologique*,” in which he endeavored to prove that all animals whatever are descended from other species of animals. He attributed the change of species chiefly to the effect of changes in the condition of life, such as climate, food, etc., and especially to the desires and efforts of the animals themselves to improve their condition, leading to a modification of form or size in certain parts, owing to the well-known physiological law that all organs are strengthened by constant use, while they are weakened or completely lost by disuse. The arguments of Lamarck did not, however, satisfy naturalists, although a few adopted the view that closely allied species had descended from each other. The general belief of the educated public was that each species was a “special creation” quite independent of all others, while the great body of naturalists equally held that the change from one species to another, by every known law or cause, was impossible, and that the “origin of species” was an unsolved and probably an insoluble problem.

The only other important work dealing with the question was the celebrated “*Vestiges of Creation*,” written by the late R. Chambers, of the great publishing firm of W. & R. Chambers, of Edinburgh. In this work the action of general laws was traced throughout the universe as a system of growth and development, and it was argued that the various species of plants and animals had been produced in orderly succession from each other by the action of unknown laws of development aided by the action of external conditions. But no great change of opinion was effected among naturalists until after the publication of the “*Origin of Species*” in 1858 by Charles Darwin. There was then no question of the origin of families, orders and classes, because the