

THE DAWN OF LIFE,

Being the history of the oldest known Fossil Remains, and their relations to Geological time and to the development of the Animal Kingdom.

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"In a little volume entitled "The Dawn of Life" (Hodder and Stoughton), Dr. Dawson, the well-known Canadian geologist, has sketched in a style strictly popular, yet without the least sacrifice of scientific exactness, the curious discovery of the Eozoon, in the limestones of the ancient Laurentian series which attain such an amazing thickness in Canada. Although the existence of organic remains in those rocks was, as the author justly remarks, a fair inference from our knowledge of them, and we may add, of the kindred rocks in Scotland and Ireland, better known to us as the Lewisian, it is entirely to the Canadian geologists that this curious solution of a difficult problem is due. It was they who perceived that, the basis of these rocks being limestone, it was more than probable, in spite of the metamorphic character they had assumed, that they were originally sedimentary deposits like the basis of other limestone, and had the same origin in the corruption of the remains of the myriads of little creatures which, both on the surface and in the depths of the ocean, are still, as the dredges of the Challenger teach us, forming beds of chalks and probably vast white cliffs to be revealed in future ages inconceivably remote. To the shrewdness of these American men of science we also owe the inference of vegetable life during the Laurentian period as evidenced by the existence of graphite or plum-bago. Thus the final discovery of Eozoon, or the "Canadian dawn-animal," as it has been called from its presence in what we have ground to assume to be the very first of all aqueous deposits, was, as has been observed, somewhat like the discovery of the planet whose existence had been first determined *a priori* from planetary disturbances. How far back this discovery, at first received with scepticism, but now fairly established as a scientific fact, pushes the period of life on our globe beyond what was till lately known as the "primordial period," may be faintly conceived from the circumstance that the Laurentian was found on measurement by the officers of the Canadian Geological Survey to be 3,500 feet thick, in three beds, which have been computed to extend over an area of 200,000 square miles. Next to Sir William Logan, perhaps Dr. Dawson himself has had more to do with this discovery of the earliest known fossil than any one else. He speaks therefore with authority in his account of the nature and probable habits of the dawn-animal, and in tracing out the important relations which the discovery bears to facts and theories which extend far beyond the strict domain of the geologist. His monograph is written in a vein of quiet enthusiasm which is justifiable, and while it attracts the novice, will not be displeasing to the scientific reader. Very little is really wanting to the full comprehension of his theme beyond the preliminary explanations, the condensed sketch of geological periods, and the wood-cut illustrations which accompany the book. We will undertake to say that even a reader who is entirely unacquainted with the science will, if he have only ordinary curiosity about natural phenomena, find this volume not only perfectly intelligible, but entertaining in a high degree."