

EVOLUTION—WHAT IS IT?

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EVOLUTION is defined by Herbert Spencer as "consisting in a progress from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, from the general to the special, from the simple to the complex; and this process is considered to be traceable in the formation of the worlds in space, in the multiplication of the types and species of plants and animals on the globe, in the origination and diversity of languages, literature, arts and sciences, and in all the changes of human institutions and society."

Evolution is also called "The theory of development."

The idea is that from some rudimentary cell or vital principle by an "immense series of changes"—the development from a lower to a higher form—all vegetable and animal life have been progressively produced.

No one making the least pretension to an elementary knowledge of the earth, its fauna and flora, will pretend to deny that there has been a gradual progress in nature. The chosen method of God has been to perform His work by successive steps. No one will doubt that God, by a single creative fiat, could have called all being into existence. But the most literal reading of the first chapter of Genesis will admit that God took six days to do what He could have done in a second of time. If Omnipotence would thus patiently and progressively work, it certainly could and might work slowly and steadily through indefinite ages. Geology and philology certainly favour the geologic reading of the first chapter of Genesis.

Instead of this statement being skeptical, it is, if demonstrated, a mighty proof of the truth of the Scriptures. For unless Moses was inspired how could he have known, before any science was formulated, the facts which it has taken mankind

nearly six thousand years to generalize? It is a most remarkable thing that the oldest book can be reconciled with the most recent discoveries in natural science. No other book can. That the Bible is exceptional, in this respect, furnishes a reasonable presumption that it is inspired.

While admitting *progress* it is not necessary to accept evolution. The steam engine was originally a conception in the mind of Hiero, of Alexandria, and from his germ-thought through a progressive series of observations reached its present perfection. These successive steps constituted a *progress*, but in no sense, and at no stage of the development, were the result of evolution. The great engine of Corliss is not an evolution from the tea-kettle of Watt. Though vegetable life began with a seaweed and ended with an oak, though animal life began with a mollusk and ended with man, it is not necessary to say that seaweeds evolved into ferns, and these into gymno-sperms, and these finally into palms and angio-sperms; nor, that a mollusk expanded into fins, and fins into wings, and wings into arms, and that man is but a beast standing on his hind legs. We think the *fact* is better stated by Dana: "There were higher and lower species created through all the ages, but the successive populations were still, in their general range, of higher and higher grade." "With every new fauna and flora in the passing periods there was a fuller and higher exhibition of the kingdoms of life."

While Agassiz admitted that a wonderful correspondence prevails amongst animals and plants in "the orders of relative succession," he steadily opposed the theory of evolution by transmutation. He always