

Chapter 2—THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF ORGANIC LIFE

(a)—Theory of Fixity of Species or Special Creation

The general opinion regarding the origin of plants and animals up to the time of Darwin was that every species came into existence by a distinct act of special creation. Each type or species remained distinct and was unable to vary in any of its individuals, except within very narrow limits. This theory was put into definite form by Suarez (1548-1617), a Spanish Jesuit, and was accepted as a doctrine of the Catholic Church. It was taken up by Milton in his "Paradise Lost," and accepted by Puritanism; it was accepted by Linnæus in his classification of plants and animals, and became "current intellectual coin."

It will be noted that this theory precludes all attempts to discover the origin of organic beings. Species were created, and nothing more was required to be said or done.

(b)—Theory of Evolution or Descent with Modification

The evolutionary conception of the organic world was held by Aristotle among the Greeks (469-399 B. C.), but for lack of facts his views were not clear and rather enigmatic. He expounded the doctrine of "a perfecting principle" which struggled with "the physical material cause," or matter itself, and worked out a continuous and progressive adaptation."¹

But little addition was made during the following seven or eight centuries to the views held by Aristotle.

In the early centuries of the Christian era Augustine (353-430), influenced by Aristotle, held that creation was the institution of the order of nature.

During the Dark Ages science slept. After the Revival of Learning and the Reformation science again revived but men's thoughts were absorbed rather with the facts of nature than with the question of the origin of things.

Then followed: (1) a group of *Philosophic Evolutionists*—Bacon, Descartes, Leibnitz, Hume, Schelling, Kant and Hegel—who established the basis of the modern methods of studying the problem of evolution; and

(1)—"Nature produces those things which being continuously moved by a certain principle contained in themselves arrive at a certain end."