

**VESTIGES OF THE  
NATURAL HISTORY  
OF CREATION**

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Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation by Robert Chambers & Henry Morley

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**ROBERT CHAMBERS & HENRY MORLEY**

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OF  
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*WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY HENRY MORLEY*

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"Marvels of clear type and general neatness."—*Daily Telegraph.*

## INTRODUCTION.

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ROBERT CHAMBERS published his "Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation" in the year 1844. He did not put his name to the book, because, as he said afterwards in a volume of "Explanations," published in 1845, his "design was not only to be personally removed from all praise or censure which it might evoke, but to write no more on the subject." Except the volume of "Explanations: a Sequel to 'Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation,' by the Author of that Work," his subsequent writing upon Science was confined to a book on "Ancient Sea Margins," published in 1848, to which he signed his name.

Robert Chambers was a man with keen powers of intellectual inquiry, and a strong interest in scientific speculation. This had caused his election in 1840 to the Fellowship of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, upon the nomination of Sir Charles Bell. He took a particular interest in Geology, and made many excursions by shores of rivers and lakes, and by sea-coasts, in search of evidence of changes made on the earth's surface by lapse of time. He went in 1848 to Switzerland, and in 1849 to Norway, to study glacial action. But Robert Chambers had yet stronger interest in the development of man. This drew him to a study of literature as the voice of life, and caused him to pay special attention to the records of earlier forms of civilisation. Such widespread activity of mind Robert Chambers had in common with his brother William, though William was more essentially the man of business, and Robert more essentially the author. It caused the two brothers to develop their business relations with literature, from a boardful of second-hand books

by the wayside to the creation of a great firm, gathering a band of writers to its aid in producing, printing, and distributing journals and books by millions through the world, all of them wholesome and instructive, all aiding in the development of men by healthy training of their minds.

When a man does only one thing, however stupid he may be, if he keep on doing it, there are many ready to accept him as a master in his art. If he have a wide interest in all that touches him as man; if he fix his mind with a keen intellectual activity on whatever is most worth attention in the world about him; if he be as ready to study the great poet of his country and write a *Life of Burns*, as to inquire into the life of Nature and explore sea margins; if it be at the same time known that he is shrewd and energetic as a man of business, and head of a great commercial firm; if he be gifted also with skill as a writer, which he is proud to use in bringing knowledge of all kinds within reach of the half-taught—what is the world to make of him, the world that wants for every man a neat label devised in about ten words of a simple sentence which shall represent what is to be said of him by those who wish to appear well informed?

There are few things in the world, if any—certainly there is not a man or woman in the world—whose nature can be told or character described in a few sentences. To understand a man fully, we must know all that he did and why each thing was done, all that he wrote and why each piece was written; how the surroundings of his life affected tone and character of thought or action; what, in each instance, determined action, and at every stage of life what was his age; for the wisdom of a man of thirty-five may be the folly of a man of seventy. And when all is known that we can know of another human worker—at most half the truth mixed with a little error—the result is a body of impressions that no label can express. We may talk of Robert Chambers's capacity in any way we please; call him a Popular Writer who might have been a famous Geologist, if he had not been a Publisher or a Man of Letters; say he might have been a famous Man of Letters, if he had not been a Publisher or a Man of Science, and if his desire for the world's welfare had not led him to address the million instead of the select critical few. It really does not matter what we say of



him, or of any writer, if we have not actually read his books; and if we have read them, it still does not matter what we say, if the opinion be one borrowed from without. A man has no opinions but those which are naturally formed within him and his very own.

All manner of opinion from without interfered in 1844, especially in Scotland, with the fair reading of a book like this of "Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation." It was met by a storm of prejudice that has now rolled away. It was a book written by a religious, earnest man who had seen and felt the harmony of Order in the works of God. He was driven to explain to those who misunderstood him, "The book is not primarily designed, as many have intimated in their criticisms, and as the Title might be thought partly to imply, to establish a new theory respecting the origin of animated nature; nor are the chief arguments directed to that point. The object is one to which the idea of an organic creation in the manner of natural law is only subordinate and ministrative, as likewise are the nebular hypothesis and the doctrine of a fixed natural order in mind and morals. This purpose is to show that the whole revelation of the works of God, presented to our senses and reason, is a system based on what we are compelled, for want of a better term, to call Law; by which, however, is not meant a system independent or exclusive of Deity, but one which only proposes a certain mode of His working." To this fact, he said, science had long pointed, though it had hardly anywhere been broadly and fully contemplated.

Robert Chambers was born in July 1802; Charles Darwin, in February 1809. "Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation" appeared in 1844; "The Origin of Species" in 1859. Darwin prefaced his book with a long list of the pointings of science to the generalisation on which he insisted. But Charles Darwin's generalisation, worked out by a mind fully trained to science, and with rare and special power, was for a long time subject to as grave misunderstanding as the argument of the "Vestiges." Yet, whether theories of development be right or wrong, certain it is that those who accept them do not touch one vital point of Christian faith. They can only add strength to our sense of the infinite Wisdom of the Creator. Do we deny our Maker because each one of us is developed from the germ to the infant,

and again from the weak infant and its germs of undeveloped faculties and powers, to the strength and wisdom of the man, who yet looks forward to the passage into higher life to come? Do we not rather wonder and adore? And if the great universe without us was so framed that—to take an extreme view—all we see has, like man, been developed also from one germ, in sublimest order by fixed processes which we call Laws, have we not still more reason to wonder and adore? God works in a mysterious way His wonders to perform, and we cannot by wisdom search Him out. Our knowledge has its bounds; but we do know that there can be no law without a lawgiver. We may speculate idly, and opinion may go far astray. No one man's ways, whatever light beat on them, are fully comprehended by his fellow-men; and when we seek to trace the ways of God in shaping the wide Earth He gives us to till and inhabit, our powers of comprehension, great as they may seem to us, cannot reach far. But the earth was given us to till not only with the plough and spade. All knowledge and wisdom of man is quarried out of the surrounding world, when we apply the minds God gave us to the traces of His Wisdom with which we are surrounded. The Laws of Nature that we seek to find are parts of the Divine Wisdom, which can be variously applied to our well-being when they have been discovered and made part of human knowledge. Bridge, mine, or tower, steam-engine or telescope, every work of applied science has this source. There is a revelation also in Nature, as Richard Hooker, on behalf of the Church, wisely told those who decried the use of Reason. The great harmonies of Nature yield us knowledge fruitful towards the development of man. Not to inquire is not to obey the will of the Creator, is to refuse submission to the hand of God, who also in this way shapes us to His image.

H. M.

January 1887.

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