ON THE THEORY OF THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES BY NATURAL SELECTION IN THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE. ON THE MALAYAN RACE OF MAN AND ITS PREHISTORIC CAREER. THE POLYNESIAN OR MAORI RACE OF MAN

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NATURAL SELECTION

IN THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

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JOHN CRAWFURD, ESQ. F.R.S

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ORIGIN OF SPECIES BY NATURAL SELECTION.

I PROPOSE in this Paper to state, in so far as concerns the natural history of Man, such objections to the Darwinian theory as have occurred to me, and which oblige me to refuse my belief in opinions which have received the assent of many eminent men of science. In doing so, I hope I shall be found to state them in those terms of respect and deference which are justly due to them and more especially to the ingenious, accomplished, and candid author of the theory.

The Darwinian theory was suggested by the well-known difficulty of determining in plants and animals what it is that constitutes a species when many species so closely resemble others as to seem but mere varieties. Hence it has been inferred that, in the course of countless ages, a small number of crude types, through a process of beneficial natural variations, have been transmuted into the many species into which the organic world is now divided. The object of the theory is to demonstrate that the whole organic creation did not, as geological evidence would seem to show, originate in a series of cataclysms, but, on the contrary, had its source in causes gradually and continuously in action, and differing in no respect from those at present in actual operation. This view supposes all organised beings to be derived from a few, or even from one progenitor or prototype. 'I cannot doubt,' says Mr. Darwin, 'that the theory of descent by gradation embraces all the members of the same class. I believe that animals have descended from

at most only four or five progenitors, and plants from an equal or even lesser number.' He is, indeed, disposed to go further than this, and to derive all organised beings whatsoever from a single progenitor. Here, however, he judges from the analogous structures and chemical composition of all plants and animals, but admits that analogy may be an unsafe guide, and so the number of the progenitors of the theory may be reckoned at from eight to ten.

But what, it may well be asked, are these progenitors or prototypes? for these words are but generic terms, which convey no notion of size, form, or quality. We must, in fact, consider them as atoms or monads of unappreciable minuteness—not visible even by the solar microscope; in truth, nothing better than 'such stuff as dreams are made of.'

The theory supposes that from the hypothetic progenitors in question—the origin of which it is as impossible for the human mind to conceive as the origin of the universe itself—have descended all living things, from the smallest infusorial animalcule up to the elephant, the whale, and man himself. These mighty results are to be attained through the preservation of 'favoured races in the struggle for life;' that is, by a perpetual sequence of profitable variations in every species of plants and animals. The profitable variations, however, which the mutations produce, are so slow, so minute, and so unappreciable that the hypothesis demands millions of years for their accomplishment; an assumption which, as it is unsupported by any fact, places it at once beyond the reach of human investigation, relegating it to the realm of imagination.

Authentic history certainly affords no evidence in favour of the theory of beneficial mutation by natural selection. The wild and even the domestic animals of Egypt have undergone no change in times of an antiquity which has been variously estimated at from 5,000 up to 10,000 years. In the Egyptian catacombs have been found mummies of the ibis and the kestrel hawk, not differing in a feather, or the spot of a feather, from these birds of Egypt of the present day. The ox, the

ass, the dog, and the goose represented on the Egyptian monuments of equal antiquity, are the same varieties which exist now. If, then, thousands of years have produced no change at all, it is reasonable to believe that, except in dreams, millions would be equally inoperative.

If the living beings of the present earth afford no evidence in support of the theory of transmutation by natural selection, neither do those which lie buried in the earth's crust; and this is, indeed, fully admitted by the ingenious author of the theory himself. 'Why,' says he, 'does not every collection of fossil remains afford plain evidence of the gradation and mutation of the forms of life?' and he adds, with a candour which is natural to him, 'we meet with no such evidence, and this is the most obvious of the many objections which may be urged against my theory.' The answer to the objection is, that 'the geological record is imperfect.' The imperfection, however, seems to amount to no more than that the record affords no evidence whatever in favour of the theory of mutation by natural selection, while it is perfect enough in an opposite direction, showing that the lowest forms of life came first into existence, and were followed by a successive series of improvements, ending with man.

As to 'the struggle for life,' there is no doubt but that, through all living beings, it is the weak that perish and the vigorous that survive. Nature in some cases takes some pains for preserving the integrity of the species, but never for its improvement by mutation. Thus, with some gregarious animals, the vigorous males, to the exclusion of the young and feeble, are the fathers of the flock or herd. At the beginning, according to the theory of natural selection, there could have existed no 'struggle for life,' when a few monads, imperceptible by the microscope, had the whole earth to themselves.

Nature, no doubt, supplies us with wonderful mutations of form and character, but they bear no analogy to those ascribed to the Darwinian theory, which are more extravagant than the metamorphoses of Ovid. The tadpole turned

into a frog, the caterpillar into a butterfly, and a maggot into a bee, are wonderful mutations, but nothing in comparison with those which suppose eight or ten nameless atoms to have peopled the land and the waters with all their varied forms of life. To bear any resemblance to the transformations of the Darwinian theory, the frog ought at least to be transformed into a crocodile, the butterfly into a dove, and the bee into a falcon or eagle.

The arguments in support of the theory of natural selection are, of course, chiefly derived from the varieties which occasionally arise in plants and animals; and this part of his subject Mr. Darwin has elaborated with the great skill and ingenuity of a most accomplished naturalist, who has travelled far and studied long. The objections which here present themselves are obvious. Variation in the wild or natural state of plants and animals is rare and evanescent, and can in no case, as far as I know, be shown to result in improvement, or what Mr. Darwin calls 'profitable variation.' It is only in the cultivated state of plants and the domesticated state of animals that variation is frequent; that is, after plants and animals have been long subjected to the control and direction of man. Even then it is but a small number of both that undergoes variation at all. The variety which takes place, therefore, under man's direction ought not to be taken into account at all, because, if the theory be true, variation must have been rife for millions of years before man existed, the geological record, the true history of these countless ages, affording no evidence of it.

But, even in plants and animals which undergo variety under man's control, there is a vast difference in the degree in which they do so, even when we are tolerably sure that the wild sources are the same species. Thus, the variety which the blue rock pigeon and the Indian jungle fowl undergo is endless, while the ass, the two camels, hardly vary at all. Even when variety takes place it ought, as Mr. Darwin expresses it, to be a profitable one to the individual; that is, be such