

THE DIRECTION OF HUMAN EVOLUTION

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The Direction of Human Evolution by Edwin Grant Conklin

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TYPES OF PREHISTORIC MEN.

Heads of *Pithecanthropus erectus* (Erect Ape-man); *Homo neanderthalensis* (Neanderthal Man); *Homo sapiens* (Cro-Magnon Man). Modelled on restored skulls by Dr. J. H. McGregor, Columbia University. Originals in American Museum of Natural History, New York City.

THE DIRECTION OF HUMAN EVOLUTION

BY

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NEW EDITION WITH PREFACE

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PREFACE TO NEW EDITION

DURING the past few years, and especially within the past twelvemonth, there has been a remarkable recrudescence of the old theological opposition to the theory of evolution, especially as applied to man. In spite of the great amount of evidence which has been accumulating during the past half century with regard to the evolution of man, it is probable that nothing more ignorant, frenzied, or intolerant has ever been uttered against this theory than has appeared during the past year.

No scientific investigator of ten years ago would have thought it possible that the truth or falsity of any scientific theory would ever again be decided by appeals to the Bible, or that an attempt would ever again be made to determine by legislation what might be considered orthodox or heterodox science; and yet this has come to pass. An organization has been perfected among certain religious denominations for the purpose among other things of banishing modernism and particularly the theory of evolution from churches and schools. Its plan of campaign has been outlined in part as follows:

"In order to purify the institutions where mod-

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ernism is taught we must discipline and reform these institutions. . . . Our universities, reeking with the unbelief of an evolutionistic false philosophy, are the most dangerous centres in America. . . . Our government has undertaken to regulate business, but the hour has come to regulate our education. . . . The use of the evolutionary hypothesis must be abandoned. . . . The new theology and modernism must be separated from our institutions of learning. . . . This splendid organization could in all probability succeed in cutting off most of the financial support from these institutions, if not in actually bringing about their total destruction." *

Acting upon this last suggestion, bills have been introduced in certain State Legislatures forbidding the teaching of evolution or Darwinism, as applied to man, and in one instance such a bill came within one vote of being passed. Text-books that teach evolution, even as an incidental part of biology or geology, have been condemned and placed on the *index prohibitus* of this new Inquisition, and it is said that funds are being raised to endow and make perpetual this fight against evolution.

All this is done, we are told, to save the religious faith of the younger generation. Apparently the leaders in this movement do not realize that they, and not the evolutionists, are making it impossible

* From *The Christian Century*, April 28, 1921.

for young men and women who are intellectually enlightened to remain in their denominations. It is a dangerous thing for defenders of the faith to affirm, as these do repeatedly, that one cannot be a Christian and an evolutionist at the same time, for students of nature who find themselves compelled by the evidences to accept the truth of evolution will be apt to conclude that they must therefore count themselves as opponents of the churches. The worst form of infidelity is not disbelief in doctrines, whether theological or scientific, but disbelief in the ultimate triumph of truth. If evolution is false, it cannot be saved by science; if it is true, it cannot be destroyed by theology. ✓

In general, the opponents of evolution have neither the technical ability nor even the desire to weigh critically the evidences for the truth of evolution. Properly to appreciate these evidences requires some first-hand knowledge of morphology, physiology, embryology, ecology, paleontology, and genetics. In science it is necessary to see and handle actual materials and processes in order to appreciate their significance, as all who have worked in laboratories know. The advice which Huxley gave to the "paper philosophers" of his day is still good advice: "Get a little first-hand knowledge of biology." But the opponents of evolution not only lack such first-hand knowledge, they usually have no desire to get it second-hand

from those who have studied nature. One of these denouncers of Darwin, when asked if he had ever read his books, replied: "I wouldn't touch them with a ten-foot pole." Neither facts, evidences, nor sweet reasonableness can penetrate such an armor.

With very few exceptions, the whole scientific world long since was convinced of the truth of evolution, and every year which has passed since the publication of the "Origin of Species," in 1859, has added to the mountain of evidence, which has been piled up in its favor. It is fortunately not necessary here to review those evidences, for they may be found in almost every elementary text-book on biology, as well as in hundreds of treatises and scientific journals. These evidences are so numerous and come from so many sources that no intelligent man can study them at first hand and not be convinced of their importance. As a consequence there is probably not a single biological investigator in the world to-day who is not convinced of the truth of evolution. The fact that these evidences accumulate year after year, coming sometimes from fields which Darwin and his contemporaries never dreamed of, is still more convincing. Lord Kelvin, the great physicist, once said that any hypothesis or theory, if true, should find new support continually as knowledge advances. This is just what has happened in the case of evolution.