

**THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION OF LIVING
THINGS AND THE APPLICATION OF THE
PRINCIPLES OF
EVOLUTION TO RELIGION, CONSIDERED
AS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE "WISDOM AND
BENEFICENCE OF THE ALMIGHTY."**

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The theory of evolution of living things and the application of the principles of evolution to religion, considered as illustrative of the "Wisdom and beneficence of the Almighty." by George Henslow

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GEORGE HENSLOW

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THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION
OF LIVING THINGS.

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This Treatise obtained one of the ACTONIAN PRIZES

for the year 1872.

55041



THE ACTON ENDOWMENT.

"HANNAH ACTON, of Euston Square, widow of Samuel Acton, architect, from motives of respect and regard for the memory of her late husband, and in order to carry into effect his desire and intention, and with a view to the diffusion and extension of useful knowledge in the Royal Institution, invested the sum of one thousand pounds sterling upon trust, so that at the end of every seven years successively one hundred and five pounds should be offered as a reward or Prize to the person, who shall in the judgment of the Committee of Managers for the time being of the said Institution, be the Author of the best essay illustrative of the Wisdom and Beneficence of the Almighty, in such department of Science as the said Committee of Managers shall in their discretion select."

[There having been no assignment of such Prize on the last septennial occasion—two Prizes were awarded in the year 1872, the other Essayist being Mr B. Thompson Lowne, F.R.C.S.]

P R E F A C E.

IN the following Essay I have abstained from offering any hypothesis whatever which might help to elucidate the methods of Evolution.

In the First Part I have endeavoured to give but little more than an outline, and that I fear a very imperfect one, of the evidence from palæontology ; while one chapter only (VIII.) contains a summary from living organisms.

Being but indifferently acquainted with zoology and animal physiology, I am conscious of not having presented to the reader so convincing an argument as might possibly have been offered. Moreover, I have been compelled (in Chapter IV.) to assume him to have an acquaintance with much matter, which, unless he have studied palæontology, probably will not

convey to his mind the same force as to the writer's. Still, if he rise from a perusal of this Essay with a stronger bias towards the Theory of Evolution of living things, and *will undertake to study nature impartially for himself*, my object will at least have been so far gained.

In the Second Part I have striven to shew that the very same laws of Evolution, which govern the origin and development of Beings, regulate as well the growth of Religion, whether in the Individual, the Church, or the Nation.

The argument is in fact cumulative, and its analogies are infinite. If the Reader can but realize this he will learn to regard the word 'Evolution' (not with suspicion or even horror!) but as expressing one of the grandest and most comprehensive laws in the universe.

It is unfortunate that some persons have entertained the idea that Evolution must be an atheistic theory. How it has arisen is not easy to say, unless it be from the fact that when a Man of Science advances a theory to account

for certain phenomena in nature, he wisely omits all allusion to any theological questions—not that he may not, or does not, the while hold views of Divine action in his own mind. Thus probably has it been with the Theory of Evolution. This word has been adopted simply to express the conviction forced upon the minds of certain observers, that all organisms are derived from preexisting ones, and not that each kind has been separately created. Moreover, it is not that nature is called in by the theorist to support his views—as some seem to imagine—but that Evolution is best able to express most of, if not all the phenomena connected with the origin of beings.

That the Theory of Evolution is not necessarily Atheistic, I trust this Essay will clearly shew¹.

¹ Of course, I am aware that the Theory of Evolution, as held by some persons, may be in appearance, if not actually atheistic; but all views of Evolution are not to be condemned, because materialists and positivists may profess to dispense with the aid of a Deity in Creation.