

Creationism in the Twentieth Century

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Abstract

The question of the origin of living things is a discussion by two groups of scientists. The statements of famous men, such as Henri Fabre, Wilhelm Johannsen and William Bateson stirred up interest, making the decade 1920 to 1929 outstanding. Two leaders were G. M. Price and W. J. Bryan. Organizations were formed, including the Evolution Protest Movement, the American Scientific Affiliation, the Bible-Science Association, and the Creation Research Society.

It may be of value for one who has lived through all of the 20th Century so far to recount his own experiences and observations along with certain notable discoveries in this period.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, evolution, in the United States, was a subject for university professors and theologians; very few others. The doctrine, then 41 years old, counting from Darwin's *Origin of Species*, had not yet appealed to the common man.

School books did not discuss the origin of the earth or of living things. The authors did not mention divine creation or materialistic theories of beginnings but ignored both of them, taking an agnostic position.

Ideas Held Over

Coming now to the beliefs of scientists at the turn of the century, we note certain beliefs of the 19th Century which still were in vogue. Among these were the inheritance of acquired characters and recapitulation in embryos. Spontaneous generation, after two centuries of struggle against disproof by Francesco Redi (1626-1698), Louis Joblot (1645-1723), and Joseph Lister (1827-1912) had finally been laid to rest by Louis Pasteur (1822-1895) in the latter part of the 19th Century (1). Even now, however, there is a desperate struggle to resurrect the theory of life arising of itself. This effort is made by persons who find it hard to prove evolution, or even to visualize it, without spontaneous generation.

Characters of living things acquired through the environment or use or disuse are recognized but they are not transmitted to the following generation (8). This is now recognized even in Russia, where a few decades ago a group with political backing held out for the theory. As for embryos going through the stages of their supposed ancestors, the idea has been dropped by both creationists and evolutionists (3). The demise of spontaneous generation, acquired characters, and recapitulation has made evolution harder to believe.

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Hero Worship

Evolution, however, the doctrine that life arose by chance and developed complexity by material forces, is not science but a type of natural philosophy. Science consists of facts but natural philosophy persists in spite of facts if it satisfies the desires of people about the nature of the world. The man who faced the scholars and theologians and changed the world view of the majority, easing their responsibility to God, became, and is, a hero.

When Gregor Mendel read his paper on inheritance in peas before the Natural Science Society of Brunn in 1865, the minutes of the meeting record that there was no discussion. The minutes record further that later in the evening, Alexander Makowsky mentioned "with the utmost enthusiasm" a book written by an Englishman named Darwin 6 years previously, called *The Origin of Species* (2). The group discussed this book the balance of the evening and all of Europe did the same the rest of the century. Since 1900 however, Mendel's influence has been tremendous.

It is true that Mendel's paper was published in an obscure journal and that he had but little time for research after he was elected administrator of the monastery where he lived. But the real hindrance was that scholars had accepted the assumption that life arose and developed by natural means, and they were looking for the methods involved.

Genetics versus Evolution

The first decade of the 20th Century was a time of great strides in genetics and cytology. Alfred Russel Wallace, Darwin's close friend and co-worker, said, "On the general relation of Mendelism to evolution, I have come to a very definite conclusion. That is, that it is really antagonistic to evolution" (4). William Bateson (1861-1926) said at the American Association for the Advancement of Science at Toronto: "It is impossible for scientists longer to agree with Darwin's theory of the origin of species. No explanation whatever, after forty years, no evidence, has been discovered to verify his genesis of species, . . . We no longer feel as we used to do, that the process of variation, now contemporaneously occurring, is the beginning of a work which needs merely the element of time for its completion: for *even time can not complete that which has not yet begun*" (5).

Along with this frank statement Bateson gave reason to believe that he still had faith in evolution and hoped some method of its occurrence would be found.

A Great Decade

The statement by this great and honest geneticist, December 21, 1921, along with others resembling it, gave a great impetus to the creationist movement in America. The decade, 1920-1930, was a time of marked and noisy protest of the common people against evolution. It was somewhat like the present movement, yet with a different flavor.

The leaders were mostly Christian ministers who were not highly trained in theology. They did well in giving full credit to the Bible but in criticising evolution they downgraded science as well. A common slogan was, "It is better to know the Rock of Ages than the ages of the rocks." Our present creationism gives due credit to a careful study of science and makes a cleavage between science and evolution, calling the latter a natural philosophy.

I remember only two outstanding leaders of this decade: William Jennings Bryan and George McCready Price. The former was well educated, although not in science, was three times nominated for the Presidency by the Democratic Party, and served as Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson. As an orator he seldom has been equaled.

G. M. Price was born in Canada, was well educated in languages and philosophy, and taught in several colleges. Through his long life he studied the history of science and reports of geologic exploration, wrote a number of books, and contributed much to the creation movement. Although accused of belonging to no scientific society, he was a member of the AAAS and the California Academy of Science. Price was criticised sharply, just as any one else is likely to be who finds fault with a "sacred cow".

The protest of the twenties was directed against those who taught evolution, and Tennessee passed a law against such teaching in the public schools. Arkansas and Mississippi did so later.

The trial which was held at Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925 to test the law has received much publicity. A teacher, John T. Scopes, was persuaded by George Rappleyea, a member of the Civil Liberties Union, to say that he had taught evolution, although he did not remember having done so (6). When W. J. Bryan decided to go to help the prosecution he asked Price to go to help him, but the latter declined because of making a trip to Europe. Bryan had not tried a case in court for 20 years and was in poor health, as evidenced by the fact that he died a few days after the trial.

The three laws against evolution mentioned above have been repealed. A more modern thrust is the ruling of the California Board of Education that where evolution is taught, creation also shall be presented as an alternative theory. Other states, notably Texas, are seeking similar rulings and Tennessee has made such a ruling as a law.

Great Men Help Creationists

All through the 20th Century the evolutionists claimed that no educated scientist has believed in divine creation, but the charge is not true. Henri Fabre (1825-1915) a French entomologist, spoke very clearly against evolution. He was well educated but preferred to live simply, devoting himself to his research and writing. Fabre stressed the importance of intelligent design in living things, and that an adaptation must be fully formed and able to function well the first time rather than accruing gradually (10).

Another very able biologist was Wilhelm Johannsen of Denmark (1857-1927). While his actual beliefs are hard to find, his discoveries disclosed the limits of selection. Johannsen found that large beans when planted usually yield large beans, just as one would expect. But narrowing his research, planting separately large and small beans which had descended from the *same plant*, there was no difference in the size of the progeny (9). Selection, Darwin's pet method, was not effective in this case. These results, obtained about 1909, have been repeated by other workers and in other species, with the same results.

Trained as I was by my study to believe that the greater the selection, the greater the improvement, these results were quite a blow to me. Johannsen taught us that selection merely sorts the genes and becomes ineffective when the genes are all alike, even though there may be differences due to environments.

James D. Watson and F. H. C. Crick, in their work which showed the gene to be very complex, and that the trait to be transmitted depends upon a code, have made it hard to believe in development by chance (7). The code resembles a word and its formation is by choice of clumps of atoms, very much as a word is formed by proper sequence of letters. Codes never have been formed without intelligence.

It is recognized that the proof or disproof of evolution comes from genetics and geology. The former has been discussed above. The developments in geology have been disappointing to evolutionists in that the gaps between the categories of fossils have not been filled. Just in living things, the orders, classes, and phyla have no plant or animal forms to bridge the gaps between them. Likewise, after much patient search, no undisputed fossils have been found beneath the Cambrian rocks. These negative results make it easier to go back to the Biblical account of a general creation in the beginning. In "Urban Geology" a practical turn is developing which is of more value than speculating on the age of fossils.

Creationists Organize

Seeing the discrepancy between the claims of evolutionists and the scientific facts, creationists were made bold to band themselves together to establish their views. At present there are coming to be many organizations, and only a few will be mentioned.

The Evolution Protest Movement of England is one of the early organizations and has had some good scientists as members. A noted one was Douglas Dewar, an ornithologist who lived in India a long time.

The American Scientific Affiliation was formed in 1941 by one man inviting five scientists to come together while he paid their expenses. Many creationists having scientific training were attracted and became members. After a few years the statement of belief was liberalized to attract more members and the thrust against evolution was lessened. The subjects chosen for discussion thereafter were the present needs of society.

The Christian Evidence League of Malverne, New York, arose in 1946. The League publishes *The Creationist*.

In 1963, at a convention of the American Scientific Affiliation and the Evangelical Theological Society, at Wilmore, Kentucky, a group of interested persons worked on the first draft of the Statement of Belief for the new Creation Research Society. The growth of the organization has been much greater than we expected.

The Bible-Science Association with headquarters at Caldwell, Idaho, was formed in 1964. Its strong features are the publishing of a newspaper and selling a wide variety of creationist literature. This organization called a 4-day meeting of all creationist groups at Milwaukee, October 10 to 13, 1972, which was well attended and set a milepost of progress.

In conclusion, let us consider how the characteristics of the present decade, 1963 to 1973, are unique. The century-old discussion has been called the disagreement between scientists and religionists; but as a news writer has well stated, the present argument is between two groups of scientists. Although educated leaders were scarce in the 1920 decade, we now have them by the hundred; the outstanding creationists today are scientists. Many of them are young men and women who have detected for themselves the mistakes in evolution, and see that divine creation is a more valid world view.

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