

“DARWIN ANSWERED.”¹

THIS genial writer has a passion for changing his position in space, peculiarly American. It is only a year since we have heard him delivering broadsides into all the propositions usually considered by scientific men to be unassailable, under the guise of a conversation with a citizen of the sun. This time he has chosen another method of attack in order to deal with another class of thinkers, and he very ingeniously leads us to infer only towards the close of the first essay where this is—the insane asylum.

It is a well-known parliamentary device of a temporary majority to move a reconsideration of a motion already carried, and then to pass it finally, not allowing it to be again raised. These tactics Mr. Benson has most skillfully carried out ; and yet so plausibly is the essay written, so much apparent earnestness does it betray, that it is only after having been thoroughly convinced of the inherent weakness of the side at which he is indirectly aiming that we see light through the plan. In the first place, with a previous experience of the contents, the title is a capital satire on those “anonymuncles” (as Charles Reade calls them), who are incessantly demanding the public ear with promises of demonstrating the wildest dreams and overthrowing the most steadfast pillars of accepted truth. Having read the article through, we thoroughly enjoy this keen sally of the title, “Darwin answered, or Evolution a Myth.” In order that the reader may not suspect the seriousness of the reviewer, he contrives to open by a pretended attack on Herbert Spencer’s inconsistency in observing that men seek for a system in nature as if nature had at heart the “convenience of book-making,” and immediately launches out into a theory of evolution. The satire here is deep but pointed. Those magazine philosophers are ridiculed who confound *different* with *opposite* propositions, by a pretence that the author does not see that Spencer referred to those very schemes of existence which begin by laying out rigid lines, and end by attempting to arrange facts within them.

¹ Philosophic Reviews. Darwin Answered: or, Evolution a Myth. Geometrical Dissertation. Notes on Definitions. By Lawrence S. Benson. New York: Jas. S. Burton, 149 Grand Street, 1875.

The next capital thrust is made after a few handsome lunges, when, after selecting Darwin as more consistent than Spencer, and enumerating the headings of his most striking chapters, Mr. Benson suddenly confronts him with his admitted inability to explain the differences of type in the human race, and then represents him as hurling every known fact against some other obstinate fact, and retreating "under cover of ignorance" * * "by asserting that there are unknown facts which *will* eventually prove that the theory of evolution is true." There is no possible doubt about the class here so wittily satirized. Even the most casual reader of current literature recognizes this caricature of those who criticize Darwin without even having read his books, and this aim is still more apparent when Darwin is represented as "ransacking" the earth to support his hobby, and finally basing his belief in it on the future discovery of unknown facts. We fancy we see a good many of this class of critics squirm.

Straightway he impales another class, that which "picks up" its information of Darwin's position, and jumbles objections fairly stated and answered by Darwin himself with those of his critics. To hit off this class, he selects at once the most obvious objection, and that most thoroughly answered in the "Origin," viz: the continued existence of lower types. The neat assumption of unsophistication with which he runs this thread out to the conclusion that everything ought "by this time to have been developed into man," is very funny. If we have a criticism to make, it is that this is a little too much "rubbed in," but its intrinsic fun may easily atone for prolixity.

This object of showing how asinine critics may appear who do not read their author, is still further followed up by some ludicrous observations on selective breeding, and Darwin's inability to *use the facts he has collected*. Still keeping his face straight, he says the theory of evolution according to Darwin "can evolve an African from a monkey better than a Caucasian from a Mongolian." Reverting to the old path of putting utterly irrelevant questions with the air of posers, he says: "Why should there be monstrosity and hybridity? If the embryonic state of all organisms be identical, why should sterility result from inter-crossing?" etc.

After a little he caricatures the literary Sergeant Bateses thus: "Take the United States; how was it they grew so fast? in less

than a century they have outstripped," etc., etc., "and have become equal to the most powerful," etc., etc. * * "But what can be said of Canada, Mexico, and neighboring states? Compared to the United States they are stagnant, asleep," etc., etc. * * "Since the last civil war strangers are now gladly welcome * * and the section promises to advance in wealth, population and enterprise." This whole page is a capital caricature of the advertising kind of magazine writers who, under the title "Darwin answered," or "Macaulay proved an iconoclast," etc., end their articles with "and in the midst of this luxuriant," etc., etc., "where the air of heaven seems to vie," etc., etc., "is a neat little farm, to be had at a moderate price. Particulars sent for a postage stamp, with the address." This breaks the monotony of skewering simply comic bunglers, and is very enjoyable, but as the latter are more numerous, the attack on them is renewed * * * "the food of vegetables is entirely inorganic substances," (pretending never to have heard of carnivorous plants).

Then Spencer is again chosen as the stake upon which to impale Mr. Benson's imbeciles. He chooses the definition of evolution by this sage, "a change from indefinite, incoherent homogeneity, to definite, coherent heterogeneity, through continuous differentiations and integrations."

This text is admirably selected for the purpose. One cannot repress the mental picture of an "end man" trying this sentence for the benefit of "Bones" at Carncross & Dixey's. But their comments, though funny, would soon pall. It needs a master hand to do this business intellectually. Well, first we have the terms integration and differentiation defined for the *Calculus* and applied here. Then the intellectual "Bones" of Mr. Benson's fancy objects that by this process *form* only can be changed, pretending not to know that form is all that we can know of force; and force and matter are the sole factors of philosophy. A very entertaining but rather far-fetched joke is introduced here, to the effect that if evolution were the division of a mass and the putting together of the parts afterwards, that this would preclude the idea of a big thing being evolved from a small one, since a part is less than the whole. And this followed by another, that "a seed *is not homogeneous*, and that therefore this theory has no application to processes by which beings exist." Also that evolution

“requires diminution of form and is not therefore the process by which life is perpetuated.” Then as to the adjectives of the definition: “Homogeneity is more distinct than heterogeneity; a substance which is the same throughout is certainly more distinct and definite than another substance composed of dissimilar parts.”

This, with some more “objections” in the way of nursery word-splitting, seems to depart too much from the usual trenchant and guarded sarcasm of the author, and descend to common ridicule; but the persistent reader will be rewarded by another piece of brilliant satire. Darwin has owned that natural selection must be understood in a metaphorical sense, but the apology is not received, and “self consciousness is implied to every living creature.” * * * * * Supposing that we have various forms of organisms, then we are to suppose “the highest wisdom and intelligence” in them, in order that improved forms may be evolved from them, for they must know the relations of things, etc., etc. “We know that such wisdom can be gained by vast experience only,” etc., etc. “Natural and sexual selection mean nothing if not that every species is possessed of a peculiar consciousness, as to know that it is existing in a transitory form; and *in consequence of this knowledge* it must copulate with some suitable individual, in order that its offspring may develop into some superior form.” “It is only in domestication that breeds improve, and this is brought out by experience and judgment.” These sentences are intended to pillory the drivelling critic; and while we cannot but applaud their success, we feel that the straw man need not have been made quite so idiotic.

Finally we have the religious sentimentalist caricatured. “Those who deny a Creator assert that things exist *necessarily* and necessity implies cause. If there is a cause it must *create* things, and necessarily that which creates is a Creator,” q. e. d. Isn't that good? Furthermore, those who seek the cause of the cause are thus answered. “If the creating cause was caused by another cause, the creating cause must have been an *effect*, and in this case it could not be a cause.”

This castigates your Middle-Age-schoolman critic.

Finally the essay closes with a *bonne bouche* directed against the sophomorical critics who fail to appreciate the force of prov-

ing too much, by showing the instability of their own theory as well as that of their opponents. "All that is known *is but one link in the chain of the Universe of existences*"—(except the knowledge of this fact, which must be another)—"and to explain the relation of this link, philosophers must know all the past, present and future—in other words have Supreme Intelligence." Ergo, nothing is certain but the deductions of this little essay, which we now leave with many thanks to its author for a powerful, if unusual and indirect method of exposing the principal absurdities of Darwin's critics. Barring a few cases where he draws the fatuousness of the pseudo-objector rather too strong, it is as amusing a little article as we have read for a long time.

We trust Mr. Benson may not destroy its merit by saying that he is all the time serious.
