

DECEMBER 6, 1864.

THE DUKE OF ARGYLL ON MR DARWIN'S  
THEORY OF DEVELOPMENT.

LAST night, the Duke of Argyll delivered the opening address of the session of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, in presence of a large audience of members and visitors. The principal subjects of His Grace's address were the idea of "creation by law," and the bearing which existing theories on the origin of species had upon our knowledge and conception. We give the portion of the address of greatest interest to the general reader, referring to recent theories of development, and especially to that of Mr Darwin.

The Duke of ARGYLL, after noticing the various senses in which the word law might be used in connection with creation, said:—It is certain that nothing is known or has been even guessed at, in respect of the history or origin of life, which corresponds with law in its strictest and most definite sense. There is no knowledge of any one or more forces—such as the force of gravitation, or of magnetic attraction, or repulsion—to which any one of the phenomena of life could be traced. Far less have we any knowledge of any such laws which could be connected with the successive creation or development of new organisms. There is one idea which has been common to all theories of development, and that is the idea that ordinary generation has somehow been producing from time to time extraordinary effects, and that a new species is in fact simply an unusual birth. It is worthy of observation that the earlier forms, in which the theory of development appeared, did suggest something more nearly approaching to a law of creation than is contained in the later form which that theory has assumed in the hands of Mr Darwin. He looked upon the adaptation and arrangement of natural forces, which could compass these modifications of animal structure in exact proportion to the need of them, as an adaptation and arrangement which was in the nature of creation. It has not, I think, been sufficiently observed that the theory of Mr Darwin does not address itself to the same question, and does not even profess to trace the origin of new forms to any definite law. His theory gives an explanation, not of the processes by which new forms first appear, but only of the processes by which, when they appeared, they acquire a preference over others, and thus become established in the world. A new species is, indeed, according to his theory, as well as with the older theories of development, simply







and some others, whom he should gladly have noticed more at length. Professor Balfour, however, had kindly prepared notices, which perhaps might now be read.

Lord NEAVES then read the notices of the Fellows who had died during the year. Of foreign Honorary members the Society had lost one—Baron Plana, of Turin. On their home list they had to lament the loss of ten of their ordinary Fellows, namely—Leonard Horner, Professor Miller, Robert Morrison, Dr Newbigging, Professor Pillans, Dr Archibald Robertson, Dr Smyttan, Lieutenant-General Swinburne, Dr R. D. Thomson, and Lord Wood. The whole number of Fellows of the Society at the commencement of this session was 279, a larger number than had been on their list for many years.

The Council of the Society reported that the Macdougall Brisbane Prize for the biennial period 1862-64 had been awarded to Mr John Denis Macdonald, R.N., F.R.S., Surgeon to H.M.S. Icarus, for his zoological papers published in the Transactions of the Society during that period.

On the motion of Principal FORBES, of St Andrews, a vote of thanks was given to the Duke of Argyle for his interesting and able address, which was briefly acknowledged by his Grace.

Tea was then served to visitors and members in the new South Room.

