

DARWIN.

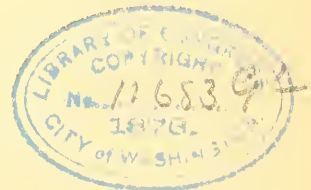
The whole of nature may be supposed to consist of two essences; one which may be termed spirit, and the other matter: the former of these possesses the power to commence or produce motion; the latter to receive it.—*Zoonomia*, vol. I. § 1. I am ready to allow, * * * that the ultimate cause of all motion is immaterial. that is, God.—*Ib.*, vol. I. § 14.

Erasmus Darwin, 1794.

BY ROBERT MCK. ORMSBY.

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PREFACE.

MR. HUXLEY recently gave three lectures in New York City, on the horse, showing that at a prior geologic period, he had four toes, and arguing that he was developed from a five toed, or clawed, mammal. In his lectures he assumed that the world had a beginning. In speaking of "the hypothesis of the eternity of this state of things in which we now are," he remarked that, "whether true or false, it is not capable of verification by evidences;" and there dropped it. This was a masterly *coup de logique!* The permanence of the laws and order of nature is a settled presumption, and it is for him who assumes the contrary to produce his proof. The burden of evidence being on the learned professor, he will do well to advance his facts; and assumed facts will not answer. He has only one authority; that is the Bible. Was it on this account that he so tenderly spared Moses, in his lectures, at the expense of the poet Milton! I hope not, for in questions of science we must not believe Moses nor the prophets. Our distinguished friend seemed to feel quiet satisfied that he had argued the horse off of his hoofs; but he was a little shy about attacking the eternity of the solar system.

The learned professor's New York lectures have provoked the evolution of this poem, and I have only to beseech him not to treat it as he did the horse, by too closely scanning its feet; because, if he does, I feel certain he will make the feathers fly, and claim they indicate a fowl origin.

*Chester Hill, Mt. Vernon,
New York.*

DARWIN.

CHRISTIAN.

Life! it is the gift of God, Creator
Of the world; the great architect who planned
And made the universe. Design is seen
In every form of life, that plainly shows
The workman. There was, of organic forms
The first, which, without creative power
Could not have sprung from inorganic dust.
Evolution! 'tis this that Huxley gives
In place of a creator, with ages
As innumerable as sea-shore sands.
Original germs there were, some two or three,
From which the varied forms of living things
Have developed out, in progressive steps,
By natural laws. Thus are we made to see
That matter, in its corpuscles, contains
Almost creative powers. But still, these germs

Of the lowest forms of organic life,
 With marvellous tendency to produce
 Superior species, and endowed with power
 Of propagation, infinite,—whence came they?
 Philosopher! can you tell?

PHILOSOPHER.

Life and God, in existence coeval
 Are, and both eternal.

CHRISTIAN.

Did life here exist
 When the earth was but a fiery vapor?
 Or an incandescent mass of matter?

PHILOSOPHER.

That earth was ever in a gaseous state,
 Is mere conjecture; and philosophy
 With conjectures deals not. We think we know
 That matter is eternal. This premised,
 We see not why the universe of worlds,
 As they now in systems revolve in space,
 Should not be eternal, too. And if so,
 Why if the solar system make exception?
 That these spheres from old to new bodies change
 We have no knowledge; nor have we knowledge
 Of any law for such a transformation.

CHRISTIAN.

Surely this earth was incandescent once,
And destitute of life; or the science
Of geology falsely teaches.

PHILOSOPHER.

The science of geology is young;
The earth is old. And those azoic rocks
Which have been thought merely foundation stones
Of life's temple here on earth, were, no doubt,
Themselves the abodes of life, when in their prime.
And the direful reign of carbon, also,
Is as imperial now, as in the days
Of those old hard-shells, orthoceras called.

CHRISTIAN.

Why are tilted the strata of the earth,
If there's been no contraction of its size?
And how contracted, unless its temperature
Has been reduced?

PHILOSOPHER.

The present must explain the mystic past.
Strata now, in every sea and ocean,
Are being formed; and there's but little doubt
But time will see them into mountains,
Hills and valleys, by some convulsion, thrown.

CHRISTIAN.

I doubt not, causes for such upheavals
 May have existence. But when we behold
 The earth's tilted strata, from east to west,
 And from north to south, with a general strike,
 We must seek, for results so uniform,
 Some single cause. The future, it is true,
 May upheavals bring; but will the strata,
 Forced up by local causes, in their trend
 Be as uniform as those that now are here?

PHILOSOPHER.

Contraction and expansion, are causes
 For upheavals: but 'tis the solar heat,
 With gaseous forces in the rocky depths,
 And not abatement of internal fires,
 That cracks up earth's stony vest, or shell,
 Causing fractures, at right angles running
 With the equator. I know, it is claimed
 That earth was once a fiery gas, or mist,
 Changed to its present state by loss of heat.
 This was an old school suggestion, and made
 Before the chemist came. The modern sees
 That the solar system, if all in gas,
 Spread out in space, would not, in temperature,

Range very high. No law is known to man
 By which this earth could in space exist
 In gaseous state, though great astronomers
 And geologists of note, have thought so.

CHRISTIAN.

At the equator, where the solar heat
 Descends in force, the sun's power might be great;
 But upheavals, in every latitude,
 From pole to pole, are seen.

PHILOSOPHER.

Very true: but the equatorial line
 Is forever changing; and that, by steps
 So slow, as to escape the observation
 Of the astronomer. The polar ice
 Alone is stationary; under it
 The earth is moving with regular pace,
 In perhaps a spiral course, which, in time,
 All its parts must bring to the icy zone.
 There, at the poles, are the mills of the gods
 Which grind so slow and fine. Our continents
 In those mills are made, together with our soil.
 Broken rock, dirt, dust, and rounded pebbles
 Are brought forth, with the emerging continent,
 And lugged away by ice-bergs, to be strewn

Where ocean currents spread them o'er the earth.
 On our hills, in our vales, we see the marks
 Of polar ice; the ledges rounded, smoothed
 And polished by the comminuting mass.
 The striæ left upon these rocky points,
 Point to the polar realms.

CHRISTIAN.

The polar zone
 Is then receding from the western world ?
 But if the Atlantic basin has moved
 From beneath the frigid zone, why are found
 Those fields of coal in the far distant north ?
 Those carboniferous beds, as we are told,
 Numerous plants contain of tropic growth.
 Then why towards the eqnator should they move ?
 And why those fossil forests in the north,
 In the realms of perpetual frost and ice,
 Unless the earth, if it does move at all,
 Is creeping the other way ?

PHILOSOPHER.

First tell me
 How came those tropic plants, thus fossilized,
 In the frigid north ? Around Baffin's Bay
 The gigantic fern, of an age remote,

Carbonized in its native soil, is seen,
 And speaks like history of a former age.
 Tropic plants must within the tropics grow.
 Some have said that, warmed by internal fires,
 The earth was once a sort of hot-house globe,
 At whose poles no chill atmospheric cold
 Could check the growth of vegetation.
 Then was the air warm, indeed, for, aloft,
 In polar regions, did aspiring plants
 Spread to the breeze their leafy branches.
 A summer sky was there, to furnish clouds
 For genial showers. To impart a warmth,
 To such extent, to the polar breezes,
 How hot should be the earth beneath? Not less,
 At least, than broiling point for fish or steaks.
 Evaporation must ensue, and drouth.
 As at the equator, roots could not dive
 For moisture, for they would encounter steam.
 Fossils of tropic plants and animals
 In many latitudes are found, which shows
 That terrestrial changes have oft occurred

CHRISTIAN.

We have never heard that the latitude
 Of any place on the earth, has been changed
 From the earliest ages.

PHILOSOPHER.

Earliest ages !

How long is that ? History backward reaches
 Three thousand years, almost; whereas, a tree,
 I have heard it said, may four thousand live.
 Such terrestrial changes should be looked for
 In the record of cycles, only; not
 In human history, which is limited
 To events of years. When the arctic land
 Was within the tropics, as once it was,
 Its departure was very slow, of course,
 As on its bosom the accumulations
 Of a vast geologic age, it bore.
 Which way does the terrestrial movement tend ?
 The question may well be asked; for no change
 Since the dawn of modern science, will point
 Its direction. On the Atlantic's shores,
 Both east and west; in Eastern America
 And Western Europe, the earth's rocky ribs
 Show the grinding power of icy mountains.
 And then, upon the globe's other side,
 Throughout Siberia's arctic realms, 'tis said
 The frozen elephants with force proclaim
 A warmer climate at some prior age.
 Such facts may show that our Atlantic land

From Asia came. The Atlantic basin
 Was a central point of the polar land
 That passed beneath the arctic snow and ice,
 With water level changing all the time.
 The carboniferous treasures which are found
 In the northern world, must Asiatic be,
 As also the fossil trees. But the trees,
 Upright, as now they stand, to have passed
 Beneath the polar ice, in the ocean
 Must have been submerged; or they may have grown
 When the gulf stream bore further west: but plants
 Of tropic growth, must from the tropics come.

CHRISTIAN.

If this be so, there is no primitive
 Formation!

PHILOSOPHER.

They view not the rocks aright
 Who to the old Silurian system point
 As holding the fossilized first parents
 Of earth's countless species; for that system
 Was in the deep bosom of the ocean
 Formed, and was not a fauna rich in life.
 But, while that formation was in progress,
 A tertiary, and alluvium, also,

Must have been extant, freighted with the life
 Of the present day, which are now, no doubt,
 In the ocean's deep bosom buried.
 No formation o'er all the earth extends;
 And as each grows up in the ocean's depth,
 Another must disappear. The faunas
 Of all formations must depend, of course,
 On their position in their watery bed.
 And the Cambrian, 'neath fifty thousand feet
 Of brooding ocean, would not be the home
 Of the prolific broods of shallow seas.

CHRISTIAN.

I must beg
 To call you back to your definition
 Of philosophy; to what it deals in.

PHILOSOPHER.

It deals in facts, and facts alone.

CHRISTIAN.

Then hold!
 Should we not stick to facts—to what we know?

PHILOSOPHER.

There are certain known invariable laws
 Of matter, a knowledge of which makes up

The sum of our philosophy. How moves
 The earth to warm with sunshine all her sides,
 Or how, by wasting fires beneath—by rains
 Or corroding frosts above, the strata,
 By disintegration are worn away,
 Is speculation foreign to our theme.
 The tracks of time may not be rightly nosed
 By the keenest scenting philosopher
 That ever embarked in chase of nature.
 But this we know, by fair deduction
 From well known laws, that, as time began not,
 And as the world is as old as time,
 All things brought forth by time's effluxion,
 That in the future we see must occur,
 Must be recurrences of like events
 Repeated *ad infinitum* in the past.
 That every strata now upon the earth
 Must some day be into new strata formed,
 Suggests the changes of the past. But then,
 We must bear in mind the controlling fact
 That organic structures are coeval
 With the universe, and God himself.

CHRISTIAN.

Organic structures embrace all species
 Of plants and animals. If eternal,
 Why are some extinct?

PHILOSOPHER.

Forms alone may change.
 What ends, began. If from primordial forms
 Species have come by evolution, then
 Primordials only must eternal be.
 We trust there's none extinct. Every species,
 In its structure, and faunal adaptation,
 Discloses perfect wisdom; a wisdom
 Not evolved from, but coeternal with,
 The organic being. Species do not die out,
 But change, if into other faunas forced;
 So that the links of life new forms may take,
 But the chain itself is never broken.
 If a creator, and he e'er began,
 Then to God himself, an eternity
 Was lost. He began not. Organic forms,
 With power of sense and thought, were either made
 Or are eternal. But suppose we say
 That Darwin's branchifiers the power of thought
 And sense embrace. By this we little gain.
 Whence those branchifiers? If self propagating,
 Organic, with sense and thought indued,
 The embryo of superior races;
 Although of form most simple in the scale
 Of animated being, their origin

Is a mystery still. Whence came their germ?
 Could it ever have had a starting point?
 Was it, by natural selection, teased
 From Huxley's mud or jelly? Or, in short,
 Did it come from a creative hand?
 'Tis vain to dwarf its origin, and say
 'Twas developed out from some still lower germ;
 For faculties of thought were never formed,
 Nor were ever organic forms brought forth,
 From senseless elements, lest this flora
 Or that fauna, should be a barren waste
 Without appropriate occupants.

CHRISTIAN

And still,
 It is thought that life is but in its dawn
 Upon the earth.

PHILOSOPHER.

Yes: and 'tis because there is and can be
 No record of the past. Those rocky leaves
 Of earth's history, which make some note of time,
 Are scanned with wonder by one whom the thought
 Of eternity confounds. Life, we see,
 Is combustion, an all-destroying flame,
 That leaps from form to form, and leaves behind
 But an ashy mound. Eternal ages

Have seen this earth replete with teeming life,
 And still the flush of youth is on her brow.
 He who was, and is, and ever shall be,
 Is ever young, and in the present lives.
 Youth is nature's aspect—eternal youth.
 There's nothing old; for with careful fingers
 Death, creeping on life's footsteps, erases
 Every trace of past existence. 'Tis true
 A few fossils, hid away in ocean caves,
 Are by some chance convulsion thrown to sight,
 To keep a trace of life in mortal view
 For a few odd millions of years, to shock
 The spectator, and fill his soul with awe.
 But in her living walks, by a system
 That never changes, nature permits no show
 Of decrepitude or age to mark her reign.
 Every mortal being has a time for life,
 And each nation, tongue and people, a day
 And generation. Three score years and ten
 Are counted the span of a human's life;
 Two thousand years a people's age. No tongue
 Now numbered among the dead, ever served
 For life's sweet uses for a longer term;
 Nor will one ever for a longer serve.
 Had some wild poet, when Antoninus

Reigned o'er Rome's imperial realms;—when, indeed,
 The whole civilized world itself was Rome,
 Her laws, letters and language extending
 From Asia's borders to the British Isles;—
 To that imperial lord have said, “My Lord,
 In five hundred years the Latin will cease
 To be a spoken language;” his lordship
 Would have shown incredulity, no doubt.
 No doubt but peoples spring, as by a sort
 Of evolution, from human masses
 Derived from disintegrated nations :
 But human history goes not back so far.
 In ten thousand years from now, no knowledge
 Of any art, tongue, people or nation,
 At present existing upon this earth,
 Will survive. Aye : let us look to the time
 When from the Atlantic a continent
 Shall appear. History will repeat itself.
 Prophetic races first come forth, of course;
 Then, by slow degrees, midst bloody conflicts,
 Civilization wins her transient reign.
 The number of dead and forgotten tongues
 In the dark past buried, is infinite.

CHRISTIAN.

Granted then, by the power of evolution,

For various species from the lower forms
 To spring, the eternity of organic life
 Has a fairer look. The earth yet may meet,
 What in the distant past it must have seen,
 Great climatic changes, hostile to life;
 Still, it would be rash to say that all life,
 By such changes, could ever be, on land,
 Or in the deep, destroyed. If eternal
 We find the earth, then dates life upon it,
 With God's existence.

PHILOSOPHER.

Climatic and other changes on earth
 Must oft occur, which would the forms of life
 Destroy or change. These changes simply mark
 The limits of variation of plants,
 And animals. Therefore, if by such change,
 Some species disappear, and other forms
 Are introduced, through the conservative,
 And wondrously preserving force of life,
 Struggling for existance, in a new state
 Of being, we witness an act creative,
 In effect, but reparative in fact.

CHRISTIAN.

Why not the earth its life? Each element,
 (And there are not more than four score in all,)

Has a vital principle of its own :
 And each, in its normal state, is a gas.
 If earth be resolved to gas, the gases,
 What e'er their relative gravities, must,
 In space, by well known laws, in social group
 Become diffused. A reign of death, indeed !
 Life, conveyed by electric spark, or ray
 Of light, may produce the material forms
 In which we find them. If we say this earth,
 Touched by the vital spark, from gaseous state
 Came forth, with discharge of imprisoned heat,
 We must expect, with all organic forms,
 That it has a day of dissolution,

PHILOSOPHER.

Earth die like man ! The vital spark to leave,
 And all resolved to gas ! Is life distinct
 From earth, with molding power; or did the earth
 Develope life ?

The embryo, or the germ,
 A mere cell, seen by microscopic eye,
 By laws of the mysterious force of life,
 Assimilates the organic elements
 Supplied from Nature's exhaustless stores.
 The vital spark ! 'tis not galvanic,

Generated in the organic cells;
But a force that, in those cells, forever
Has held its reign; reigning through organs
Cerebral, indued with the power of thought
Which conscious is, through the voluntary,
But not, when through the involuntary,
System, acting. It never sleeps, and is
A controlling power, and the providence
Of living things. This providence is shown
At every stage of being. The wondrous force
Called *vis medicatrix*; the instincts
That never err: the natural passions
Which, at every point of the being's life,
Promotes the success of a destined end;
And then the plan or scheme, as if designed
By wisdom divine, by which the species
Are from extinction saved; this perfect round
Of well planned means to ends, invests this life,
This ruling force of the organic being,
With something more than mere material powers.
But not alone within the tissue cell
Works this magic force; but, likewise, without,
Its powers are sometimes felt, and are the cause
Of what have been thought interpositions
From the unseen world. Its sphere is not known.

We simply understand, it is the force
That controls existence from end to end,
Seeing all its objects attained in full.
Man is thought the wisest of breathing things :
But without control of this higher power,
His existence would find an end at once.
When the individual's career is o'er
And every object of his life obtained,
What then remains, and what its destined end ?
Many look with dread on dissolution,
As though life could ever become extinct;
But such forebodings are but borrowed fears.
Death is a phantom; not a real foe.
All creeping, breathing things, are here fixed fast,
And must here remain. Eternal wisdom
With which we find this endless life imbued,
Has lodged the highest joy in youthful veins,
And hence permits, not death, but renewals
To everything that lives. Each germ thrown off
By the parent plant, animal, or man,
Is that parent's self—is his very being—
With all his habitudes, moral, mental
And physical, indued. Throughout his life
Such germs must be, in numbers vast, evolved,
And in them, as they grow up around him,

Does the parent, with life renewed, exist.
These emanations from the parent stock
Draws each a part of the parental life,
And are, as is seen, but transition steps
Of the paternal being, who thus goes forth,
In youth and beauty, in life's new career.
Thus renewed, the new form survives the old,
Which yields to dissolution : but this fate—
All dreaded death—when Nature's path is trod,
No terror has—has no pang. One by one,
As age advances, the ruling passions
And strong desires of early days, depart,
Till the mind itself is almost a blank.
Soon memory ceases to recall ideas
Of events or forms; and the aged one,
Fed like a babe, step by step, weaker grows,
Untill naught but the withered form of man
Remains. By slow degrees, the senses all
Are seen to fail; the eyes no longer see,
Nor longer hear the ears; nor any taste
In the palate left. Before the lingering,
Vital spark shall go out, all sense and thought
Will long have ceased. The change is then complete;
And the monumental stone simply marks
One stage of man's existence.

CHRISTIAN.

With your philosophy, I find no fault.
You grant me God; and, in organic life,
You find a providence; and races new,
Evolved from antecedant races, which,
In one sense, you say, is called creation.
That God is eternal, I will concede.
If earth began, 'twas not the beginning
Of God, nor of his world; but must have been
One stage, only, in an infinite round
Of transformations, which never began,
And, hence, will never end. God's magnitude
Will not be compressed to the dimensions
Of man's philosophy. We must enlarge
To take him in, or our structures fall
At his approach. Man is a finite being,
And must build his philosophic systems
With movable timbers, because often
He will have to alter and enlarge them.
I think well of your speculations, for,
It is the true sphere of philosophy
To find out God, and not ignore him.