

The death of Charles R. Darwin marks an epoch in scientific circles. Perhaps no man in any age has exerted so profound an influence upon scientific thought as he. A most industrious observer, he gathered great masses of facts upon which he and others based generalizations of startling significance. The facts remain; but the generalizations are probably destined to be greatly modified by subsequent observers. The "struggle for existence" of which he says so much in his "Origin of Species" does exist, as we all know. The fittest, the strongest, the best adapted to their surroundings, whether plants or animals, survive, while the weak, the unfit and the unadapted perish. The philosophy of evolution which has taken such deep root in modern times, largely under the teachings of such men as Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Huxley and Tyndall, is not a new philosophy, but has simply been expanded and brought more strenuously before the attention of thinkers and readers. Evolution, in its ordinary sense, almost every cultivated person believes. Evolution, according to Mr. Darwin and Mr. Spencer, deals with a large number of hypotheses which have not yet been verified. The worst feature about Mr. Darwin's doctrines of evolution is that, at least in the minds of young students of science, it dispenses with design in the creation of the universe, and therefore a Designer, though Mr. Darwin himself seems to have been a believer in an intelligent Creator. At the close of his "Origin of Species" he says: "There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that whilst this planet has gone cycling on, according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning, endless forms, most beautiful and most wonderful, have been and are being evolved."

Those young men, therefore, who have dabbled just enough in science to get half acquainted with Mr. Darwin's works, and who ostentatiously claim that the universe is a machine which has and always will run without an engineer, may be sure that they have far surpassed Mr. Darwin in their atheism. Many eminent scientists, such as Asa Gray, of this country, and the late Sir Charles Lyell, have expounded Mr. Darwin's doctrine of natural selection as in harmony with the best religious Deism. Mr. Darwin was not a theologian. He was a student of the phenomena of organized life, and strove hard to carry the explanation of its phases further than ever has heretofore been done. His works on insectivorous and climbing plants are among his most remarkable productions. He seems, in these works, to strive to find a connection between the co-ordinate movements of the hairs of the sundew plant which bend simultaneously upon and entrap a fly and ultimately digest and assimilate it, or the movement of climbing plants and tendrils about adjacent supports, and the phenomena of mental life in intelligent animals. But, as we have already said, while some of the hypotheses of Mr. Darwin, built upon his facts, are destined to be discarded altogether, or greatly modified, his facts will remain for other philosophers to build upon. He was a most persistent, careful and conscientious observer. He seemed to have ever in mind or in consciousness the correction expressed by Sir William Hamilton, who said: "There are more false facts current in the world than false hypotheses to explain them; and there is nothing, indeed, which men seem to admit so lightly as an asserted fact." Darwinism will not be prejudicial to religion in the long run. When the young scientists of to-day, who, while busily digesting half-truths, are ready to believe that Darwin has found the key to the universe, shall have drunk more deeply of the Plerian spring, they will see that, after all, he but waved a larger torch than his predecessors. Darwin has broadened the human mind in one special direction. He has shown that many things that were supposed to be fixed are really in a state of flux and change.

Species may or may not grow from other species; but at least they are subject to changes which, in long periods of time, may take on specific characteristics. Certain it is that whereas a quarter of a century ago people generally believed that all species of oaks were specifically created oaks, by an intelligent creative act, they now believe that at least it is quite probable that all oaks are but branching descendants of one original, and that perhaps other cup-bearing trees, whether walnuts, hazelnuts, or oaks, in a far-off past had a common progenitor. Such a hypothesis we may say has probabilities, but cannot be regarded as proved. Most religious teachers have long since recognized that the sincere, honest study of facts in order to obtain an explanation of organic life, is a legitimate field of research. They only object to the flippant dogmas and suppositions of philosophers falsely so-called, whose great aim seems to be to drive God out of the universe. Such a scientist we believe Darwin was not.