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CHARLES DARWIN

On the same day that gave Lincoln to America, Charles Darwin was born in England. His influence in the world of science was as great as Lincoln's influence in the world of politics. It is probable that these two men fixed the status of the nineteenth century as the century of greatest advance in thought that the world has yet known.

Darwin's great work, "The Origin of Species," which has changed the entire science and philosophy of life, appeared when Darwin was fifty years old. It was the first clear explanation of the law of natural evolution, and the first demonstration of the natural origin of living forms as natural descendants of pre-existing forms. It did not convince many of his contemporaries; but it led them to study, and they convinced themselves.

Since Darwin's time, the development of the compound microscope has revealed many things of which Darwin knew only by analogy, but most of them have tended to establish and confirm what was originally known—and often ridiculed—as "the Darwinian theory." It is not called a theory now; for evolution is a fact as clearly established as the precession of the equinoxes.

In Darwin's day most churchmen antagonized his theory as contradictory to their understanding of the scriptures. Churchmen of today have enlarged their understanding of Holy Writ, and few now contend that the world was turned out finished four or five or six thousand years ago. They know that the great work of creation, never finished, is renewed unceasingly and ever will be.

The chief and essential contention of Darwin —that species are formed by natural process, is now accepted by the thinking world as established beyond question. That the plants and animals of the present day are descendants of the plants and animals of earlier times, and they in turn from previous forms of life, is one of the certainties of modern science.