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978-1-108-00023-9 - Modern Ideas of Evolution as Related to Revelation and Science

John William Dawson

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Darwin's theory of evolution generated a storm of controversy within the scientific community in the later nineteenth century, and Sir J. William Dawson, a renowned geologist of his time, was one of those who vehemently opposed it. In *Modern Ideas of Evolution as Related to Revelation and Science*, first published in 1890, Dawson maintains that it is religion alone that forms a stable base for all new ideas. He dismisses the theory of evolution as a crude and heretical hypothesis, inconsistent with religion and undeserving of acceptance. If adopted as proven truth, he argues, it would lead to unscientific and unspiritual degeneration of the mind. More than a century later, evolution is generally accepted but still not 'proven', and the debates continue. Dawson's energetic polemic remains a key document for historians of science concerned with the Victorian reception of Darwinism and the rise of evolutionary theory.

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MODERN IDEAS
OF
E V O L U T I O N
AS RELATED TO
REVELATION AND SCIENCE

BY

SIR J. WILLIAM DAWSON, C.M.G. LL.D. F.R.S. &c.

AUTHOR OF

'ACADIAN GEOLOGY THE CHAIN OF LIFE IN GEOLOGICAL TIME'

'EGYPT AND SYRIA, THEIR PHYSICAL FEATURES IN

RELATION TO BIBLE HISTORY' ETC.

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P R E F A C E

THE object of this work is to examine in a popular manner, and to test by scientific facts and principles the validity of that multiform and brilliant philosophy of the universe which has taken so deep hold of the science and literature of our time. The task is a somewhat ungracious one, especially in England whose people are naturally proud of discoveries and generalisations which, originating among themselves, have taken the world by storm. It is also extremely difficult, because of the dazzling and attractive nature of the hypothesis of evolution, the dashing and plausible character of the arguments by which it is sustained, and its all-embracing scope, which enables it to account for everything that has previously been mysterious. Besides this, it is of the nature of this protean philosophy that it should itself be in process of evolution from day to day, and thus to be in so

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rapid motion that it changes its features momentarily while one endeavours to sketch it.

Why then attempt such a task? The answer is two-fold—general and personal. First, the world of general readers is captivated, dazzled and perplexed by the new philosophy, and greatly needs some clear and intelligible exposition of its nature and tendency, some classification of its variations, and some attempt to explain its agreement or discordance with science and religion. Secondly, the writer of the following pages has of late years been besieged by so many letters and inquiries respecting this subject, to which he has incidentally referred in popular books on science, that it becomes necessary in self-defence and to save time to prepare an answer which may meet all demands of this kind.

The conclusions which he has reached as the result of much reading and reflection, as well as of a long-continued and somewhat wide and varied study of nature, may not satisfy the present excitement of enthusiastic specialists and lovers of novelty, but they may serve somewhat to mitigate present extremes of feeling and belief, and may accord with the sober second thoughts which sometimes follow sudden revolutions.

J. W. D.

1890.

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