Bone of Contention

by

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EP BOOKS (Evangelical Press)
Registered Office: 140 Coniscliffe Road, Darlington, Co. Durham, UK DL3 7RT

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First published as a series of articles in *Evangelical Times* in 1976.

Fourth edition 2020

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available

ISBN 978–1–78397–292–0

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Introduction

The first edition of this little book was published in 1976. During the 40 years that have gone by since then, major advances have been made in genetics, in the history of science, in understanding radioactive dating; in fact, across the board. What is remarkable is that the fundamental message carried by the first three editions has not changed, except to be strengthened. Some of that material has been replaced in this fourth edition, not because it was wrong but because it has been superseded. A bibliography has been added at the end of the book. This aims to provide textual support for the evidence that is cited in the five chapters and to enable those who wish to do so to take matters further

One thing is certain: Darwinian evolution, a theory that was never very strong, has been progressively weakened by the emerging evidence. For Biblical Creation, the worldview which gave rise to modern science, the reverse is the case. Always strong, it has not been undermined by the evidence but rather strengthened further, for those who have eyes to see it.

Sheena Tyler kindly contributed the additional section found on pages 58 to 60.

1
How evolution took over

"Darwin's theory is no longer a theory but a fact. No serious scientist would deny the fact that evolution has occurred." So spoke Sir Julian Huxley in 1959, 100 years after Charles Darwin first put forward his theory of evolution. In a book published in 2001, veteran evolutionist Ernst Mayr echoed his words, stating that "Evolution is no longer a theory. It is simply a fact." Darwin's theory caused a storm of controversy when it appeared and the majority of leading scientists of that day at first opposed it; now we are told that it is no longer a theory but a fact and our children are taught in school that it is a *fact* that humans have evolved from ape-like creatures. In fact, our whole society has been influenced by the evolutionist outlook that there is no Creator, no plan or purpose behind the Universe, no future judgement, no accountability to a higher power and no absolute standard of right and wrong. Such views are based on the supposed "fact" of evolution. But is it a fact? Is the theory of evolution proved beyond doubt?

First we must consider one particular question: how did the theory of evolution come to be so successful?

Where did it all begin?

The idea of evolution certainly did not begin with Darwin. Many scientists and philosophers believed it before his day. It arose

first among the ancient Greeks, when Anaximander taught that people had evolved from fish and Empedocles asserted that animals had been derived from plants. These views, however, were not generally accepted.

Spontaneous generation?

One reason for this was that another theory about the origin of living things became so popular that it cast evolutionary ideas into the background. This was the view known as spontaneous generation which taught that creatures could arise suddenly from mud and slime. Aristotle and others first put this forward centuries before the birth of Christ. They believed that they could see flies and other insects suddenly appearing out of mud; and if that could happen to insects, then why not to all creatures? This theory was just as unbiblical and unscientific as that of evolution itself. Gregory pointed out in AD 400 that if slime was the cause of all living things, there was no need to believe in God as Creator. His criticism was ignored, however, and spontaneous generation was believed for an incredible length of time until finally disproved by Pasteur in the 19th Century. It is astonishing that it should have been believed for so long. Two hundred years before Pasteur, the theory had been challenged by the great scientist William Harvey and investigated scientifically by Francesco Redi. Redi's contemporaries believed that maggots could arise spontaneously from decaying meat. Redi experimented by covering the meat so that the flies could not lay eggs on it—and after that maggots were no longer produced.

It is no surprise that spontaneous generation was proved false; but how had it held the field for so many hundreds of years, against the advice of eminent scientists and contrary to scientifically controlled experiments? I believe the reasons to be the same as those for which the theory of evolution is believed today. They are summed up in the opinion of the

scientist Haeckel: he claimed that spontaneous generation *must* be true because otherwise it would be necessary to believe in a Creator. People believed this theory because they did not want to believe in the God of the Bible. Exactly the same is true of many evolutionists today, and in some ways evolution is rather like an elaborate sophistication of that old superstition. Does it not teach that living matter has suddenly 'appeared' from non-living?

What about fossils?

For century after century, therefore, the theory of evolution was kept from becoming popular by the dominance of an equally godless theory, that of spontaneous generation. Looking back it seems strange that fossils were not brought forward as evidence for evolution, since they are considered so important today. People certainly knew about them, for fossils were first noticed by the early Greeks. They recognised them for what they are, the petrified remains of living organisms. However, by the Middle Ages, fossils were no longer reckoned to have anything to do with living animals. People believed them to have been formed in stone by the action of the sun and stars and this superstitious view kept them from being investigated scientifically.

One of the first to look at fossils scientifically was Ristoro d'Arezzo , a man who obviously believed in the Bible. In 1282 he suggested that all the fossil evidence supported the Bible's account of a world-wide flood. This work was ignored and forgotten for hundreds of years, but it does show that the early work on fossils did not suggest the idea of evolution.

In the seventeenth century, Niels Stenson, known as Steno, put forward ideas as a result of studying rocks and fossils. He was the first to suggest that the rock strata represent layers of rock deposited on top of one another at different times in the earth's history, with the oldest layer to be found at the bottom.

As a result he is known as 'the Father of Stratigraphy'. Steno's arguments did not lead to any general acceptance of evolutionary ideas. He himself believed that all that he observed was consistent with what the Bible teaches about a world-wide flood. In fact, the end of the seventeenth century has been described as the 'heyday' of the Diluvialists (those who believed that geological phenomena could be explained by the Flood). One man who contributed greatly to this 'heyday' was John Woodward who has been sarcastically described as the "Grand Protector of the Universal Deluge". However, the value of his work is universally acknowledged, to the extent that he is also regarded as "the Father of Geology". Woodward's careful and exact investigations of the earth's rocks and fossils certainly did not lead him to a belief in evolution. He concluded that all the evidence, far from suggesting that rock strata had been laid down at different times, spoke instead of a single world-wide flood—the Biblical Deluge. The fossils, he said, were on the whole the remains of animals that had died in the Flood.

As the science of palaeontology developed and became established, it was belief in the Flood that was often driving it. For the early palaeontologists, the study of fossils simply did not suggest the idea of evolution. Instead, the great fossil graveyards that began to come to light spoke more clearly of catastrophe. It is no exaggeration to say that virtually all the early palaeontologists were opposed to evolution, a fact acknowledged by Charles Darwin. Modern-day geologists and palaeontologists would do well to remember that both of these disciplines were established by Bible-believing 'creationist' scientists.

Sowing the seeds of evolutionary theory

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, people began to voice ideas about evolution again. One of these was Erasmus Darwin, Charles' grandfather, who must have influenced Charles to some

extent. Another was Lamarck, who subsequently became famous as an evolutionist. At the end of the eighteenth century he gave lectures in Paris advocating evolution, although he did not produce much evidence to support his ideas, Lamarck did not succeed in making evolution popular because once again there was opposition to the theory. This was led by Georges Cuvier, one of the greatest of the early palaeontologists, a brilliant man who enjoyed international fame and respect.

Cuvier was lecturing in Paris at the same time as Lamarck. Lamarck would lecture on evolution in one room to a few people, while Cuvier next door would be speaking to a packed lecture hall, opposing evolution with all his strength. In this way, he kept evolution at bay for several more decades. His knowledge of fossils was astounding, yet the fossil evidence did not for one moment suggest evolution to him. The tragedy was that, although Cuvier was so opposed to evolution, he did in fact help to sow the seeds of its later success. As the rocks and fossils began to be studied in more detail, they did not seem to Cuvier to fit into the simple flood model of the Diluvialists. He believed that he could see evidence of several major catastrophes of which the Flood was the most recent. In doing this, he was responding to the fossil evidence in a way that did not accord with the Bible. Cuvier had such a famous name and reputation that many followed him. Belief in the Flood as recorded in the Bible, which had already declined since Woodward's day, was thus further undermined and this eventually helped Darwin's ideas to succeed.

While Cuvier was attacking evolution in the realm of palaeontology, changes were taking place felt in the realm of geology. In 1795, James Hutton propounded his theory of 'uniformitarianism'. This is the theory that geological processes have always operated as they do now and that the earth's present form was not shaped by major catastrophes such as a world-wide flood.

It is important to realise that it was not the evidence itself that initially led to this major departure from the prevailing belief that the rocks showed evidence of catastrophe. Hutton was part of the so-called Scottish Enlightenment group of intellectuals who regarded human reason as supreme and rejected any authority that they felt could not be justified by their reason. While not necessarily atheists (Hutton himself was a 'deist'), they were atheist in practice when it came to geology, having already rejected the authority of the Bible. Hutton looked at the rocks through mental 'spectacles' which specifically precluded the idea of the Flood, or any similar catastrophe, and decided that processes going on now, such as river erosion and weathering, are quite adequate to explain the present state of the earth. Uniformitarianism eventually gained a stronghold in geology and palaeontology which lasted for more than 100 years and which still operates in the background at times.

When I first began to speak on these topics in the early 1970s, if I mentioned the word 'catastrophe' the response from many audiences would be boos and jeers. There was no evidence of major catastrophe in the rocks! What an ignorant fool I was! That had all been disproved long ago! These audiences were unaware that behind the scenes at that time, uniformitarianism was beginning to crumble. Nowadays, it is fully acknowledged that the rocks show evidence of major catastrophe having taken place in the past.

The uniformitarianism versus catastrophism saga can teach us important lessons. For over 100 years, the very obvious evidence of catastrophe that exists in the rocks became invisible to most geologists and palaeontologists. This illustrates the power of a faulty world-view to blind us to evidence. Surely it cannot have done either of those disciplines any good to be operating in this way. It is fair to assume that the disciplines of geology and

palaeontology were both impeded once the 'Enlightenment' view took hold.

One man who took up Hutton's ideas and enlarged on them was Charles Lyell, whose work *Principles of Geology* influenced Darwin greatly.

Darwin and 'The Origin of Species'

Through such men as Hutton and Lyell, evolutionary thought developed in the years before Darwin began his work, but his is the name supremely associated with the idea. Charles Darwin did not really say anything new. Most of the elements contained in his theory had already been suggested before but they had never previously been presented so precisely and coherently or with what at first sight might appear to be so much supporting evidence.

What did Darwin's theory, described in his book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, actually say? He started by assuming that the young always differ in many small ways from their parents and that these differences (which Darwin assumed to emerge randomly by some unknown process) can be passed on to later generations. He argued that animals possessing favourable variations will increase in number, while others will tend to die out. By this process of selection, Darwin said, new species might eventually arise. He claimed that he had been led to this theory by observations that he had made in the Galapagos Islands off the coast of South America. He noticed that the species on the Galapagos resembled those of the South American mainland but were not identical with them. For example, there seemed to be a special race of giant tortoise on each island. By this process of selection, Darwin said, new species might eventually arise.

Today it is asserted that it is no longer a theory but a fact that