

THE SUNDAY DELTA.

DARWIN ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES.

Several of the British Reviews have been seriously and laboriously occupied, of late, with the discussion of the new theory of the origin of species, put forth in a work by Mr. Darwin, an English naturalist, which has before been mentioned in this paper. The Westminster Review (of radical and infidelic tendencies) favors the author's theory, and regards it as a legitimate development of that positive science around whose cradle, like the serpents strangled by the infant Hercules, innumerable dogmas of orthodoxy lie cold and stiff or wriggling, in their death agonies. The Edinburgh Review, on the other hand, (liberal, but leaning to conservatism,) pronounces the theory to be totally unsupported by either conclusive or probable induction.

The very words which designate the subject of the theory in this case, demand for their comprehension a human impossibility. They require that man shall by his own unaided ability conceive, or by some process of reasoning arrive at, a clear and definite idea of his own beginning; for the origin of species in general includes the origin of the human species in particular. He could only do this by passing beyond space and time, and arrogating functions that belong to Infinite Power. At the utmost, then, in a strictly philosophical point of view, Mr. Darwin could accomplish no more than show us the secondary origin of species, or the differentiation by which new species arose from the old. And this, in fact, seems to have formed substantially the groundwork of his theory. Believing that, within human experience or paleontological knowledge, species once existing have been transmuted, by pressure of outward circumstances, first into varieties and gradually into entirely different species, he infers that all the present forms of organic life were derived, by this transmutational process, from a very few original types, perhaps from one original germ.

As regards origin and result, Mr. Darwin's theory does not differ materially from the developmental theory of the author of the Vestiges of Creation. But as regards intermediate causes, his theory is altogether his own. Transmutation of species on a large scale, he believes, takes place by a natural selection similar to the transmutation which, he asserts, takes place, wholly or in part, on a small scale, by the artificial selection practiced by man in regard to domestic animals and cultivated vegetables. In one case the change results

from the struggle for life among individuals of the same species, under circumstances more or less favorable to each, according to those peculiarities which distinguish them as individuals. Those whose peculiarities disqualify them for life in the given circumstances, perish, while those more favored in that respect live and transmit the qualities to which they owe life to their offspring; and if the circumstances should continue to vary, the species would also go on varying in an equal ratio. A French philosopher, De Maillet, about two centuries ago, conceived a theory of transmutation which differed from this of Mr. Darwin only in the fact that he ascribed the organic and functional changes undergone by various species of animals to an extraordinary demand upon certain powers of the body and the comparative absence of others, while Mr. Darwin ascribes them to individual peculiarity of form, and peculiarity of the vital and assimilative powers, combined with circumstances conducive to the perpetuation of both.

In the opinion of both these theorists, the seal may have been derived from the polar bear, and the whale from the seal; and should whales, seals, and polar bears perish from any cause whatever, we would be justified in looking for the gradual conversion of the Esquimaux into aquatic animals, endowed with all the qualifications called for by the peculiar situation.

Progression is not an essential element of Mr. Darwin's theory, as it is of the developmental theory advocated in the Vestiges of Creation. Degeneration would seem to be equally incidental to it with progression. Under circumstances in which the struggle for life demanded, from generation to generation, more and more the qualities of the horse, men would in time be transmuted into horses; or if it demanded more and more the qualities of an alligator, they would gradually take on a saurian form; or if it demanded more and more the qualities of an aquatic bird, they would in time be gifted with webbed feet, wings, bill, gullet, and all the nutritious paraphernalia suitable to the case; and so it is not impossible, according to the Darwinian theory, that even a Darwinian philosopher may be at this moment an incipient goose!

The developmental theory made it quite easy to derive the negro from the orang-utan and gorilla; the Darwinian theory makes it equally easy to derive those animals from the negro; and, between the two theories, it may be regarded as a moot point whether the nations of Africa are now undergoing transmutation into the great monkey family. Perhaps if the African motes were transplanted to Louisiana sugar and cotton plantations, where it would no longer be necessary

sions, where it would no longer be necessary for them to climb trees to escape from the lion, the tiger, the leopard, and monster serpents, and where those would thrive best who could best digest pickled yuck and Indian corn-bread, they could, by process of natural and artificial selection, be sorted into tolerably fair field-hands! Who knows! Why not inaugurate the experiment by chartering a company for importing monkey apprentices? It would assuredly be less crass than the Coolie trade, and less obstructed by legal vexations than the African slave trade.

On the whole, the Darwinian theory is very ingenious, and the author sustains it with great ability and research; but, nevertheless, he has not succeeded in so presenting it as to close the door against deductions there abhorrent to the instincts of human nature or so absurd as to place it below serious consideration. A basis for the theory is wanting in authentic and undisputed scientific fact. Granting that

whole species in the course of time have perished, it is not scientifically established that any existing species was derived by transmutation from another differing from it as widely as an elephant differs from the infusoria or as man differs from an oyster.