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Bryan on Evolution

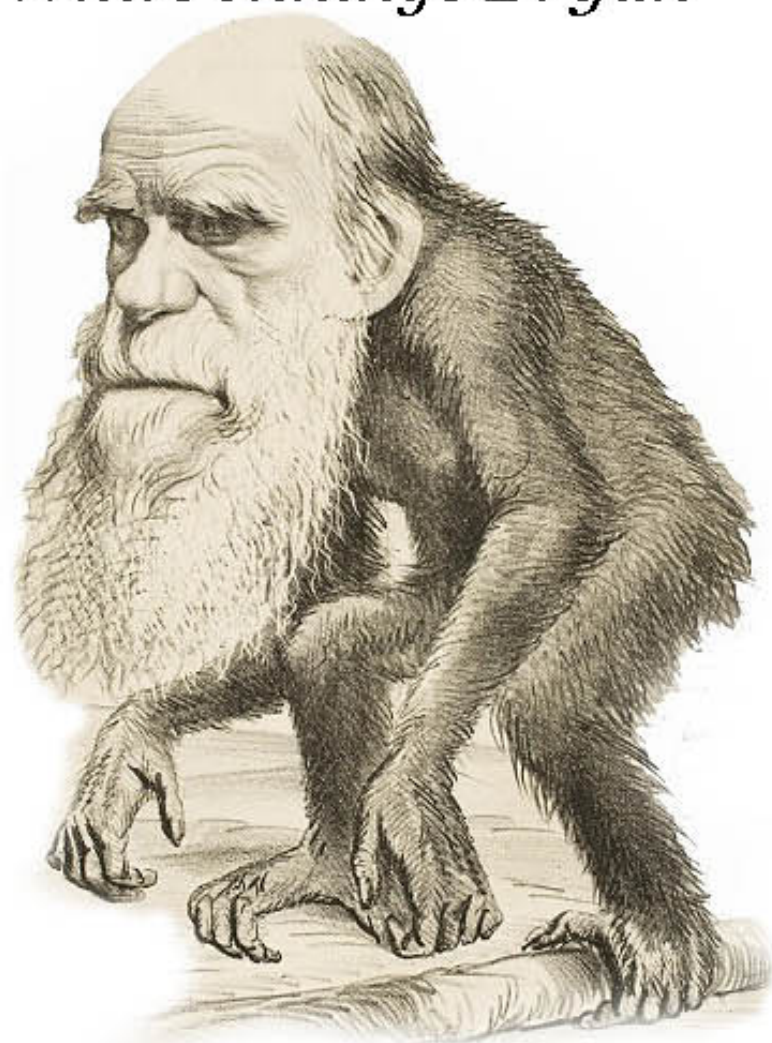
Condensed from
The Forum (July, '23)



by William Jennings Bryan

LIBERALISM," however you define it, is built upon the guess to which the euphonious name of "evolution" has been given. Not all evolutionists are dissenters, but all dissenters are evolutionists—some theistic evolutionists and some atheistic evolutionists. Those who call themselves theistic evolutionists indignantly deny that evolution is inconsistent with Christianity — but what are the facts?

First, Darwin began life a Christian but, following the hypothesis that bears his name, he rejected, one after another, the vital principles of the Christian religion. In his youth he was laughed at by some for quoting the Bible as an unanswerable authority on some point of morality. Just before he died he wrote a letter (see his "Life and Letters") in which he says, "I do not believe there ever has been any revelation." He goes on to say that about the time he wrote "The Origin of Species" he deserved to be called a theist because he felt "compelled to look for a first cause." But after that this belief, he says, gradually became weaker. He inquires, "Can the mind of man, which has been developed from a mind as low as that possessed by the lowest animals, be trusted when it draws such grand conclusions?" (as God and Heaven). He concludes, "The Mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble by us, and I for one must be content to remain an *agnostic*." If that is what Darwinism did for Darwin, what is it likely to do for immature students who are throwing off parental authority and who gladly accept any hypothesis that will justify them in throwing off the authority of God also?



An 1871 Caricature of Chas. Darwin

That Darwin's experience is the natural and logical result of the evolutionary hypothesis has been proved by Prof. James H. Leuba (in his "Belief in God and Immortality"). Of the answers he received from the 5,500 leading scientists of the country, over half stated that they did not believe in a personal God or a personal immortality. He then selected nine representative universities and wrote to the students. The answers showed that 15 per cent of the freshmen had discarded Christianity, 30 per cent of the juniors, and from 40 to 45 per cent of the men who graduated.

There is nothing in education that naturally weakens faith. The church has been the greatest patron of learning. What is there, then, in our colleges that undermines faith and paralyzes religion? Only one thing: namely, an hypothesis that links man in blood relationship with every other form of life, animal and vegetable, and makes him cousin to brute, bird, fish, and reptile—to flower, fruit, vegetable and weed. Even in Christian colleges the student is asked to substitute evolution for the Bible record of creation although *not one species has ever* been traced to another species. The "missing links" between a million species — Darwin estimated the number at from two to three millions—are yet to be found; not one has been produced. And yet it is a common thing for evolutionists to declare that evolution is as firmly established as the law of gravitation.

Third, "theistic evolution" is even more demoralizing in its influence than atheistic evolution. The latter denies the existence of God and this arouses indignation. Theistic evolution on the other hand lulls the young Christian to sleep, with the assurance that evolution recognizes God and offers a more sublime method of creation than the Bible records. It is an anesthetic; it deadens the pain while the Christian's religion is being removed.

There are all shades of belief among theistic evolutionists. Some stop when they have traced their ancestry to the jungle, and are inconsistent enough to accept all the Bible except Genesis. Some reject some of

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the miracles, retaining the theory of atonement, the virgin birth, and the resurrection, in spite of the fact that they all involve the miraculous. Others go still farther differing at the place at which they stop, while some, like a Presbyterian preacher in New York, boldly announced that they do not accept *any* of the propositions declared by the General Assembly to be "essential" as well as true.

Some evolutionists put the beginning of life at 25 millions of years ago, some, like Darwin, put it at 200 millions of years; others add all the ciphers they have to spare. Some theistic evolutionists, like Canon Barnes of Westminster Abbey, commence with the universe filled with "stuff" and imagine electrons coming out of "stuff" and forming atoms, atoms forming matter, matter forming life, life forming mind, and mind forming spirit, with infinite ages since God's creative power was permitted to act. Their far-away God does not invite prayer or give the comforting assurance of His presence—what coercive power has the sense of responsibility if it must be strained through the blood of all animal life, believed to form man's ancestry? There is no place in evolution for the cry of the penitent soul; it knows no such transformation as being born again or having sins forgiven. As Romanes confessed even when an agnostic, it substitutes the "lonely mystery of existence" for the "hallowed glory" of the creed of orthodox Christianity.

The evolutionary hypothesis is the only thing that has seriously menaced religion since the birth of Christ and it menaces all other religions as well, and civilization as well as religion—at least, that is the conviction of a multitude who regard belief in God as the most fundamental of all beliefs and see in Christ the hope of the future.

The world is just emerging from the bloodiest war known to history. Science and intellect guided the nations, and made war so hellish that civilization itself was about to commit suicide. It is evident that nothing but universal peace can save the world, and nothing but universal disarmament can bring universal peace. To whom can the world turn, except to the Prince of Peace? But we must not divest Him of the strength that the task requires. Darwin's God was nowhere—he could not find him; Darwin's Bible was nothing—it had lost its inspiration; Darwin's Christ was nobody—he had a brute for his an-

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cestor. Evolution, carried to its logical conclusion, robs Christ of the glory of His virgin birth, of the majesty of His deity, and of the triumph of His resurrection; such a Christ is impotent to save. If love is to be substituted for force and co-operation for combat, religion must lead the way.

The Presbyterian Church has reiterated its faith in God, in the Bible, and in Christ. In May, 1923, the Southern Baptist Convention endorsed as its platform the presentation of the vital Christian principles. Other churches will do likewise. I doubt not that the movement will grow and spread until the song that startled the shepherds at Bethlehem will become the world's international anthem.