

Evolution on New Phase

The evolution theory is entering a new phase, "emergent evolution," that will cause everybody to realize that it vitally affects his personal well being, Prof. William E. Ritter, biologist of the University of California and president of Science Service, declared in an address on the relation between science and the newspapers at the Nashville meeting.

Replacing the emphasis upon the anthropoid origin of man, the rise of races, the origin of species, and other still important and well authenticated portions of the evolution theory, Dr. Ritter foresees prime attention paid to the following three factors:

1. Individual men and women, boys and girls, and even just-born babies are to loom larger in biological science than they have heretofore. It will be realized that nature cares for the individual as well as the race.

2. The doctrine of the fundamental independence and separableness of body and mind is marked for extinction. There is no trace of such a thing as a body independent of a mind or a mind independent of a body. Emergent evolution will go far toward delivering civilization from the nightmare of the materialistic-mechanistic philosophy.

3. Interest will shift from problems of exactly when and how and where man originated to questions of what he is and may become as through-and-through a natural being. The order of nature is truly universal, limitless in space and time, self-adequate and unified from minutest detail to mightiest system. There is neither place nor need anywhere for such a conception as that of the supernatural.

"There is left no trace of doubt," said Dr. Ritter, "about the adequacy of the creative power of the natural order to produce man, not only with all his physical, but with all his spiritual attributes.

"Most vital is the perception that religion based on probably the most powerful and universal of all human emotions, the sexual emotion only excepted, is natural in the same sense that all other emotions are. Much of the best modern thinking seems already to have gone thus far. But the further step, apparently made inevitable by the conception of emergence, is that the religious emotion is a response to the natural order. It does not depend on a supernatural order or even a belief in such an order, as has been so generally supposed. Common interpretation has put the cart before the horse in this as in so many other of man's efforts at interpretation—especially interpretation of his own nature.

"Almost certainly man's belief in the supernatural has resulted from his efforts toward a rational explanation of the peculiar form of his emotion here involved. Even yet the natural order to which this emotion is a response so vastly out-distances his factual knowledge and his powers of scientific generalization concerning it that it is not surprising he should have created, and still hold in imagination, that is to say, should make hypotheses of the existence of bodies and powers quite outside of and beyond the natural order."

Discussing the newspapers of the country and their relation to science, Dr. Ritter declared that the common meeting ground of journalism and science is truth.

"Man has arrived at an unprecedented critical stage in his millennium of effort to make his positive knowledge of himself and of the world contribute in the highest measure to his own good. That stage is marked by nothing less than the necessity of displacing the legendary, mythical, and merely authoritarian knowledge which has constituted his theology by his scientific knowledge of himself and the world, and of accomplishing this without impairing in the least degree anything essential and valuable to the emotional side of his religion. If we grasp this situation fully and resolve to face it squarely we shall see that the chief lack of preparedness of both science and journalism, as of all other educational agencies, is lack of preparedness to grapple rationally

with the two overwhelmingly powerful and pervasive emotional attributes of man's nature, those of his sex and of his religion."

Among the foremost factors that have contributed to the making of civilization today are science and journalism, Dr. Ritter pointed out.

Science News-Letter, January 7, 1928

Evolution Reaffirmed

Darwin's evolution, under state law ban in Tennessee, was declared "a fundamental phenomenon of life established with a certainty comparable with that of Newton's law of gravitation or of the Copernican conception of the solar system" by the president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Dr. A. A. Noyes, in his address opening the meetings.

"While even less can be said today of the processes by which evolution takes place than was thought to be known fifty years ago," said Dr. Noyes, "the fact that evolution has been going on and that many animal types have gone through definite stages of development can only be doubted by an individual who, like an ostrich, buries his head in the sand out of a vague dread that he may see something shocking.

"These advances in science have greatly influenced the philosophic and religious thinking of the scientific men, for it is a great mistake to think the tendency of advancing science is toward materialism. Just the opposite. The repeated discoveries of new and unexpected types of phenomena in the physical world make us realize more than ever the limitations of our understanding and lead us to feel with the poet that 'as knowledge grows from more to more, will more of reverence in us dwell.'"

Science News-Letter, January 7, 1928

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