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THE
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EVOLUTION is the working hypothesis of most scientific men at the present time. In no branch of science is it without influence, and in the sciences which deal with life it is dominant. We cannot escape from it. Its technical phrases have become parts of current common speech; and such words as "natural selection," the "struggle for existence," and "the survival of the fittest" are on the lips of every one. It does not matter to what sphere of human work we turn, for in all alike we meet with the same mental atmosphere. Are we students of physics or chemistry, we have no sooner mastered the elements of the science than we are plunged into questions which deal with the "evolution" of the "atom" or the "molecule" from simpler forms of matter. Do we study mechanics, then we are brought into a sphere where men talk of the evolution of the steam engine or of some other
machine which has slowly grown from less to more till it has reached its present state. Are we students of man, then we become accustomed to inquiries into the evolution of the family, of marriage, of the community, of the state. Morality is evolved, religion also. On all hands men are busy tracing out the lines of evolution from the general to the particular, from the simple to the complex, until it is affirmed "that the whole world, living and not living, is the result of the mutual interaction, according to definite laws, of the powers possessed by the molecules of which the primitive nebulousness of the universe was composed" (Huxley, Life of Darwin, vol. ii., p. 210). It is evident enough that, in these views of Professor Huxley, evolution has passed beyond the stage of a working hypothesis, and has become both a philosophy and a dogmatic faith. We are restricted to molecules, their powers, and the interactions of their powers for the explanation of the universe; when the molecules are given in their primitive nebulousness, the whole result follows. There can be no increment from without, no guidance from above, nor any leading along a definite line to a predetermined end. The molecules and their interactions must be competent to produce all that has come out in the process. We need not say how great is the issue involved in this claim, nor how strenuously it is to be resisted. It is something gained, however, to have the claims of evolution considered as a dogmatic faith stated so clearly, and to know with what we have to deal.

Manifestly evolution as a working hypothesis and evolution as a dogmatic faith mean very different
things. Even if we grant that it is more than a working hypothesis—let us grant that it is the highest scientific generalisation to which the human mind has yet attained; that in it we have a law of the widest working which is operative in all the realm of nature, animate and inanimate—yet this concession falls far short of the immeasurable demand which Professor Huxley makes in the name of evolution. Let us suppose it proved as a scientific generalisation, and we may still say, with Professor Fraser, "evolution itself, if proved, would be only an expression of physical causation—of phenomenal significance and interpretability—though it may yet turn out to be the most comprehensive of all merely phenomenal laws, and the highest expression of the sense symbolism, a physical causation, which Berkeley has so emphatically contrasted with spiritual and transcendent causality" (Fraser on Berkeley, p. 227). But the advocates of evolution are not content with the concession that it is the most comprehensive of all phenomenal laws; they demand absolute submission. Evolution must reign without a rival; everything must bend to its sway.

The imperious demands which Professor Huxley, Mr. Herbert Spencer, and others make in the name of evolution must not be allowed, however, to frighten us away from the name, or to blind us to the truth which is contained in it. Extravagant claims must not be allowed to discredit legitimate demands. In fact, the real work done by evolution, the truth set forth by it, the grandeur of its generalisation, and its consistency with scientific truth generally,
make one sorry when the theory is pushed to an extreme which makes it untrue and inadequate. We are not surprised when the expounders of this theory of the universe are filled with cosmic emotion at the greatness and grandeur of the process they describe; nor do we wonder that they are carried away with the rapture into which they are thrown: for no reader can withhold his sympathy and admiration. It is grand and ennobling to sweep back in thought across the hundred million years or so which separate us from the time when our earth was only vapour, and to be led on from that point of time, through all the intervening ages, as one science after another guides our footsteps, until we arrive at the complex, differentiated, integrated world of the present time, with its life, intelligence, ethics, religion, science, art, and to have some understanding of the process whereby this has come out of that. But we may still have the rapture and the admiration: we may admire and so far revere and be thankful for the work done in the service of evolution, and yet withhold that final sacrifice demanded in her name.

Almost every book on evolution and every magazine article devoted to the subject tries to hark back to the "primitive nebulous." Not many of them, however, commit themselves to any definite theory on the question of the nebular view. Some, indeed, with a courage which we cannot sufficiently admire, speak as if Kant or Laplace had left nothing for their followers to do. Mr. Fiske is quite sure on the matter. "In the slow concentration of the matter constituting this solar nebula," he says, "as both Kant and