

explanation would involve one in all sorts of absurdities and dilemmas. The biologist therefore is convinced that evolution does explain many things; peculiar facts, for the meaning of which no other theory has ever offered a solution.

So much for the point of view of the biologist. The average naturalist looks upon evolution not as a theory but as a demonstrated fact. We need not quarrel with him. He has a right to his opinion. But, after all, the average naturalist is an eccentric sort of an individual. His tastes are queer, else he would not be what he is. And the habits formed in the pursuit of his hobby tend to accentuate his perversity. What are we as sane, unbiased men of affairs, whose judgment is kept in balance by continued contact with the real problems of life—what are we to think of the fantastic speculations of these secluded denizens of the laboratory or meandering investigators of nature?

To avoid confusion in the use of terms we must distinguish well between the doctrine of evolution and the several attempts that have been made to explain the why and how of it. Darwinism is such an attempt; one of the first in the field and by far the most advertised; the one that brought the theory itself before the public and hence is in popular apprehension inseparably bound up with evolution. Darwinism is the brand of pseudo-science dished out for us on the editorial page of the Sunday "yellow sheet." It is an unmitigated evil because it insists on a material explanation of everything and emphasises *ad nauseam* the brute element in human nature. It is not evolution, it tries to be more than that—a philosophy of evolution.

We must realise, in other words, that there is a distinction between evolution in the abstract, and that concrete, living movement, fathered by atheistic scientists, which is the sole vehicle to-day for the dissemination of evolutionary ideas. The theory was born and reared in an irreligious atmosphere. Its present-day dress, its daily associates, do not recommend it. We shall have to divest it of these incidental accessories, if we wish to probe its essential nature.

The first question to be considered then, is, what are we as Catholics, as defenders of the faith of our fathers, to think of the theory of evolution in the abstract, pre-scinding from its actual philosophical environment and unsavory associations.

We may emphatically insist that such a theory does not affect our idea of the creation of matter, nor does it discuss the ultimate origin of life. These things are taken for granted, just as physics takes for granted the existence of matter and force. It can have nothing to say concerning the origin and ultimate nature of the principles according to which living things act. Like chemistry, it may discover the existence of certain laws and their mode of operation; it cannot say why these laws are there or how they came to be what they are.

The theory simply states that the organic world arrived at its present status through a natural process analogous to the development of the chick in the egg or of the oak from the acorn. It makes no attempt to account for the first forms of life. It does not deny that God created the world in its present form any more than the farmer denies that his corn was created by God in its full stature just because he, the farmer, saw it develop.

It does not affect our idea of God and the universe in the least; or, if it does, it is to emphasise His power and to give us a better conception of His manner of dealing with creatures. Looked at in this light, the matter is primarily of no concern at all to the priest, any more than is the subject of electricity or chemical affinity; it is exclusively a topic for the scientist.

Those who are fearful lest such a doctrine is incompatible with Scripture and Revelation will do well to read carefully the first chapter of Genesis and to consult the reflections of St. Augustine and St. Gregory of Nyssa. St. Augustine clearly believed that God created living things *in potentia*, that is, put the germ of life into matter and then permitted it to develop of itself. The Scriptural account of the order of creation harmonizes with the idea so strikingly that the evolutionist may actually quote it in his favor.

Nevertheless, it is unquestionably dangerous to flirt

in so conciliatory a manner with a pure abstraction. The thing as it really exists to-day in the world of modern thought is a philosophy of life, and a very reprehensible one. Let us examine it. Before beginning, it may be well to realise that for a priest a peculiar difficulty presents itself when he tries to evaluate intelligently this new school of thought. He has been trained in a school of his own which looks upon Revelation as the central fact of life. For him Christ is the dominant figure of history. The Incarnation gives unity and meaning to his philosophy. The decalogue is his guide, eternal happiness his goal. He is positive in his faith. He is not groping in the dark. And modern thought is largely the negation of all this.

And yet it is more than a mere negation; it is not pure chaos and destruction. The modern mind is building up a system of thought, a system of philosophy, that is really a unified whole, as clear-cut and well-defined in many respects as was the Scholastic system of the Middle Ages, and I may add far more dogmatic. Of course the central idea of this new edifice is not the Incarnation; its ultimate goal is not future happiness. It is a system of naturalism with man in the centre and evolution as its alpha and omega. Its conception of life is materialistic or pantheistic. Its pioneers and its present sponsors are in the main agnostics or avowed atheists. It claims not only to be an explanation of the proximate conditions in the organic world, but it proposes an ultimate philosophy that needs no God, that knows nothing of a free will, that demands a revision of the moral code, that has no patience with the doctrine of immortality.

And it is all this because its principal exponents were from the beginning hostile to the Church and they thought to have found in the new ideas a splendid weapon against her; a weapon that could be used with equal force to discredit the theologian and to arouse the imagination of the ignorant. It compelled the abandonment of age-long convictions hitherto considered inseparably bound up with our most cherished religious truths. If there is any truth in evolution, then God did not make the world as we see it to-day. It simply grew. Likewise, the world is more than six thousand years old. Man was not formed from the slime of the earth by the hand of God: he developed from it according to natural laws. Language was not given to man and miraculously confused at the tower of Babel: it developed in natural fashion from simple beginnings to the varied forms existing to-day. Religion was not given us from above: it was a natural by-product of man's developing mental life.

There is the whole process in a nutshell. One or two of these propositions must indeed be accepted if we assent to the evolutionary idea. But by a trick familiar to politicians in a modern legislature, all the other propositions are attached to the main one as "riders," and the bewildered onlooker is told that there is no choice—take all or leave all.

The common mass of mankind does not follow the trend of argument by which such a philosophical system is built up; but the almost hypnotic influence that the spectacular achievements of modern science has gained over the mind of men, induces them to accept blindly whatever is proposed in the name of science.

Moreover in our public schools, from the grades to the university, every text book from history and geography to literature, psychology, economics, linguistics, anthropology, ethics, and all the rest, begins with and is developed around the principle of evolution. There it finds unity of plan and purpose in what seems to the uninitiated a hopeless tangle of ideas and theories. The ordinary man or woman of our times, it is true, knows little of modern thought and its underlying philosophy. However, for us the practical importance of a knowledge of this kind is not so much in dealing with ordinary people as in being able to stand up before the leaders of modern thought, who through teachers and text books give the ordinary mortal unconsciously if you will, his world views, that is to say his creed and his ethics. This ordinary mortal fails to assimilate the real significance of the new thought. It is enough for him to know that he has authority for discarding the old order and living according to the new moral code. In this way then the modern scientific viewpoint is producing a tremendous change in the life of the masses. It is one of the principal forces at work shaping