

SAMUEL WILBERFORCE 1805–1873

An Anglican minister and Bishop of Oxford, Wilberforce was an amateur naturalist, but his review of *The Origin of Species* in the conservative *Quarterly Review* (1860) reflected more his view that the Bible is the divinely inspired word of God than it did his scientific interests. At a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science on June 30, 1860, Wilberforce concluded a violent attack on *Origin* by asking Thomas Henry Huxley, Darwin's most eloquent spokesman, whether it was from his grandfather or his grandmother that he claimed descent from an ape. According to an eyewitness, Huxley responded: "A man has no reason to be ashamed of having an ape for his grandfather. If there were an ancestor whom I should feel shame in recalling, it would be a *man*, a man of restless and versatile intellect, who, not content with an equivocal success in his own sphere of activity, plunges into scientific questions with which he has no real acquaintance, only to obscure

Evolution is, in truth, an ingenious theory for diffusing throughout creation the working and so the personality of the Creator. And thus . . . such views really tend inevitably to banish from the mind most of the peculiar attributes of the Almighty.

– SAMUEL
WILBERFORCE



"Am I a Man and a Brother?" Cartoon published in *Punch*, London, 1861

Many were offended by Darwin's suggestion that human beings and monkeys shared ancestry. (Art Resource)

them by an aimless rhetoric, and distract the attention of his hearers from the real point at issue by eloquent digressions, and skilled appeals to religious prejudice."

FROM

Review of *Origin of Species*, 1860

On what then is the new theory based? We say it with unfeigned regret, in dealing with such a man as Mr. Darwin, on the merest hypothesis, supported by the most unbounded assumptions. . . .

. . . Place the first beginning where you will, that beginning *must* contain the apparent history of a *past*, which existed only in the mind of the Creator. If, with Mr. Darwin, to escape the difficulty of supposing the first man at his creation to possess in that framework of his body "false marks of nourishment from his mother's womb," with Mr. Darwin you consider him to have been an improved ape, you only carry the difficulty up from the first man to the first ape; if, with Mr. Darwin, in violation of all observation, you break the barrier between the classes of vegetable and animal life, and suppose every animal to be an "improved" vegetable, you do but carry your difficulty with you into the vegetable world; for, how could there be seeds if there had been no plants to seed them? and if you carry up your thoughts through the vista of the Darwinian eternity up to the primaeval fungus, still the primaeval fungus must have had humus, from which to draw into its venerable vessels the nourishment of its archetypal existence, and that humus must itself be a "false mark" of a pre-existing vegetation. . . .

Our readers will not have failed to notice that we have objected to the views with which we have been dealing solely on scientific grounds. We have done so from our fixed conviction that it is thus that the truth or falsehood of such arguments should be tried. We have no sympathy with those who object to any facts or alleged facts in nature, or to any inference logically deduced from them, because they believe them to contradict what it appears to them is taught by Revelation. We think that all such objections savour of a timidity which is really inconsistent with a firm and well-instructed faith. . . . He who is as sure as he is of his own existence that the God of Truth is at once the God of Nature and the God of Revelation, cannot believe it to be possible that His voice in either, rightly understood, can differ, or deceive His creatures. To oppose facts in the natural world because they seem to oppose Revelation, or to humour them so as to compel them to speak its voice, is, he knows, but another form of the ever-ready feeble-minded dishonesty of lying for God, and trying by fraud or falsehood to do the work of the God of truth. It is with another and a nobler spirit that the true believer walks amongst the works of nature. The words graven on the everlasting rocks are the words of God, and they are graven by His hand. No more can they contradict His Word written in His book, than could the words of the old covenant graven by His hand on the stony tables contradict the writing of His

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hand in the volume of the new dispensation. There may be to man difficulty in reconciling all the utterances of the two voices. But what of that? He has learned already that here he knows only in part, and that the day of reconciling all apparent contradictions between what must agree is nigh at hand. He rests his mind in perfect quietness on this assurance, and rejoices in the gift of light without a misgiving as to what it may discover. . . .

Mr. Darwin writes as a Christian, and we doubt not that he is one. We do not for a moment believe him to be one of those who retain in some corner of their hearts a secret unbelief which they dare not vent; and we therefore pray him to consider well the grounds on which we brand his speculations with the charge of such a tendency. First, then, he not obscurely declares that he applies his scheme of the action of the principle of natural selection to MAN himself, as well as to the animals around him. Now, we must say at once, and openly, that such a notion is absolutely incompatible not only with single expressions in the word of God on that subject of natural science with which it is not immediately concerned, but, which in our judgment is of far more importance, with the whole representation of that moral and spiritual condition of man which is its proper subject-matter. Man's derived supremacy over the earth; man's power of articulate speech; man's gift of reason; man's free-will and responsibility; man's fall and man's redemption; the incarnation of the Eternal Son; the indwelling of the Eternal Spirit, — all are equally and utterly irreconcilable with the degrading notion of the brute origin of him who was created in the image of God, and redeemed by the Eternal Son assuming to himself his nature. Equally inconsistent, too, not with any passing expressions, but with the whole scheme of God's dealing with man as recorded in His word, is Mr. Darwin's daring notion of man's further development into some unknown extent of powers, and shape, and size, through natural selection acting through that long vista of ages which he casts mistily over the earth upon the most favoured individuals of his species. We care not in these pages to push the argument further. We have done enough for our purpose in thus succinctly intimating its course. . . .

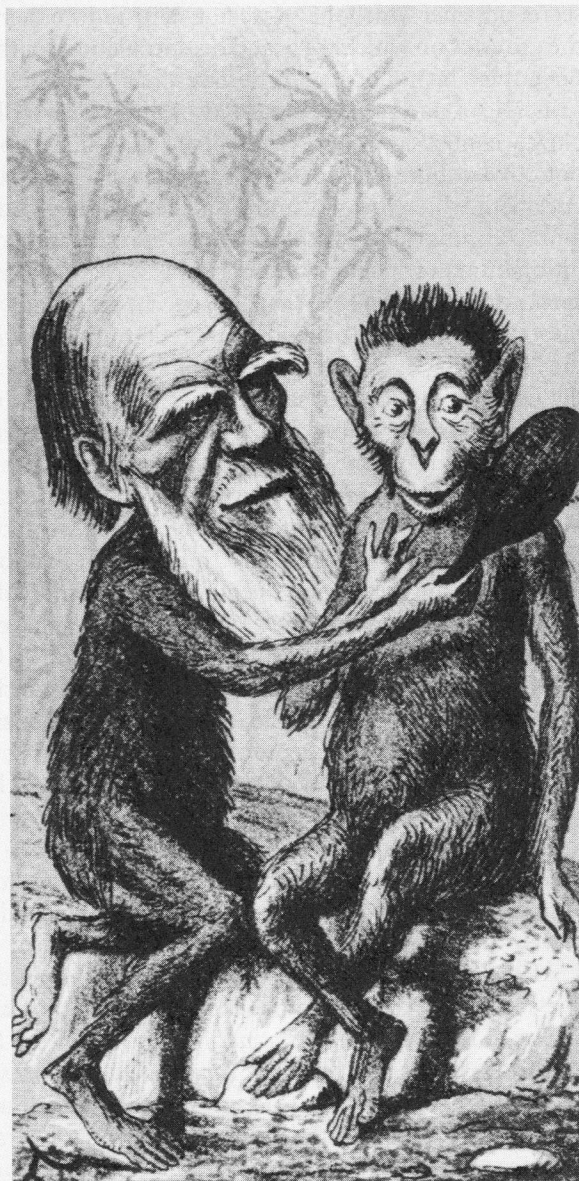
Nor can we doubt, secondly, that this view, which thus contradicts the revealed relation of creation to its Creator, is equally inconsistent with the fullness of His glory. It is, in truth, an ingenious theory for diffusing throughout creation the working and so the personality of the Creator. And thus, however unconsciously to him who holds them, such views really tend inevitably to banish from the mind most of the peculiar attributes of the Almighty.

How, asks Mr. Darwin, can we possibly account for the manifest plan, order, and arrangement which pervade creation, except we allow to it this self-developing power through modified descent? . . .

How can we account for all this? By the simplest and yet the most comprehensive answer. By declaring the stupendous fact that all creation is the transcript in matter of ideas eternally existing in the mind of the Most High — that order in the utmost perfectness of its relation pervades His works, because it exists as in its centre and highest fountain-head in Him the Lord of all. Here is the true account of the fact which has so utterly misled shallow observers, that Man himself, the Prince and Head of this creation, passes in the earlier stages of his being through phases of

existence closely analogous, so far as his earthly tabernacle is concerned, to those in which the lower animals ever remain. At that point of being the development of the protozoa is arrested. Through it the embryo of their chief passes to the perfection of his earthly frame. But the types of those lower forms of being must be found in the animals which never advance beyond them—not in man for whom they are but the foundation for an after-development; whilst he too, Creation's crown and

Darwin ridiculed
Some of Darwin's
critics were so
distressed by his
theory of evolution
that they parodied
him by depicting him
as a monkey, or at
least as a man willing
to equate monkeys
with people. (Hulton/
Archive)



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perfection, thus bears witness in his own frame to the law of order which pervades the universe. . . .

. . . We trust that he [Darwin] is mistaken in believing that he may count Sir C. Lyell as one of his converts. We know indeed the temptations which he can bring to bear upon his geological brother. The Lyellian hypothesis, itself not free from some of Mr. Darwin's faults, stands eminently in need for its own support of some such new scheme of physical life as that propounded here. Yet no man has been more distinct and more logical in the denial of the transmutation of species than Sir C. Lyell, and that not in the infancy of his scientific life, but in its full vigour and maturity. . . .

He [Lyell] shows the fallacy of Lamarck's reasoning,¹ and by anticipation confutes the whole theory of Mr. Darwin, when gathering clearly up into a few heads the recapitulation of the whole argument in favour of the reality of species in nature. . . .

We trust that Sir C. Lyell abides still by these truly philosophical principles; and that with his help and with that of his brethren this flimsy speculation may be as completely put down as was what in spite of all denials we must venture to call its twin though less-instructed brother, the "Vestiges of Creation."² In so doing they will assuredly provide for the strength and continually growing progress of British science. . . .

¹[Lyell] . . . reasoning: Lyell challenged the theory of Jean Baptiste Lamarck (1744–1829), a French naturalist who argued that acquired characteristics can be passed on from one generation to the next. Lamarck's work was an important forerunner to Darwin's theory of evolution.

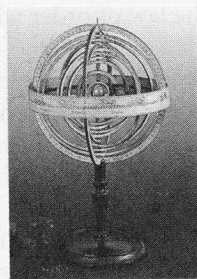
²"Vestiges of Creation": In *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) Robert Chambers (1802–1871) developed an evolutionary theory, but his work lacked evidence and was generally rejected by the scientific community.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON 1809–1892

English poet laureate from 1850 until his death 42 years later, Tennyson was viewed in his own time as the spokesman of his age. His poems often made public issues out of his personal concerns. *In Memoriam* (1850), a series of elegies for Tennyson's close friend, Arthur Hallam, who died in 1833, chronicles the stages of the poet's long-continuing grief. Tennyson's faith that Hallam's death has some meaning is shaken by evidence from the fossil record, which reveals many extinct species from the past, suggesting that there is no God who cares about the life and death of individual creatures.

Science, and especially evolutionary theory, made it difficult for many in the nineteenth century to maintain their belief in traditional religion. The famous stanzas presented below, published a decade before

Though Nature, red
in tooth and claw
With ravine, shrieked
against his creed —
— TENNYSON, *In
Memoriam*



Armillary sphere, heliocentric, c. 1810

This Italian sculpture shows an early understanding of the solar system. In the center is the sun, around which several rings revolve. The inner rings mark the orbits of Earth, Mars, and Jupiter, giving the planets' speed of rotation. The large outermost band is inscribed with the signs of the zodiac and months of the year. (Art Resource)

The Origin of Species appeared, indicate just how pervasive evolutionary theory was at the time. Tennyson was probably thinking specifically of the ideas of geologist Charles Lyell when he wrote these verses.

FROM

☞ *In Memoriam*

54

O yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;

That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed,

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Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete;

10 That not a worm is cloven in vain;
That not a moth with vain desire
Is shriveled in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain.

Behold, we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream; but what am I?
An infant crying in the night;
An infant crying for the light,
20 And with no language but a cry.

55

The wish, that of the living whole
No life may fail beyond the grave,
Derives it not from what we have
The likeliest God within the soul?

Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type^o she seems,
So careless of the single life,

30 That I, considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope through darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
40 And faintly trust the larger hope.

56

"So careful of the type?" but no.
 From scarpèd¹ cliff and quarried stone
 She cries, "A thousand types are gone;
 I care for nothing, all shall go.

"Thou makest thine appeal to me:
 I bring to life, I bring to death;
 The spirit does but mean the breath:
 I know no more." And he, shall he,

Man, her last work, who seemed so fair,
 50 Such splendid purpose in his eyes,
 Who rolled the psalm to wintry skies,
 Who built him fanes^o of fruitless prayer,

Who trusted God was love indeed
 And love Creation's final law—
 Though Nature, red in tooth and claw
 With ravine, shrieked against his creed—

Who loved, who suffered countless ills,
 Who battled for the True, the Just,
 Be blown about the desert dust,
 60 Or sealed within the iron hills?²

No more? A monster then, a dream,
 A discord. Dragons of the prime,
 That tare^o each other in their slime,
 Were mellow music matched^o with him.

O life as futile, then, as frail!
 O for thy voice to soothe and bless!
 What hope of answer, or redress?
 Behind the veil, behind the veil.

¹ scarpèd: Cut away to expose the layers of rock.

² sealed . . . hills: That is, as fossils.

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¹ Montanvert: One c