

# On the Farms of Life changing almost simultaneously throughout the World.

Scarcely any palæontological discovery is more striking than the fact that the forms of life change almost simultaneously throughout the world. Thus our European Chalk formation can be recognised in many distant regions, under the most different climates, where not a fragment of the mineral chalk itself can be found; namely, in North America, in equatorial South America, in Tierra del Fuego, at the Cape of Good Hope, and in the peninsula of India. For at these distant points, the organic remains in certain beds present an unmistakable resemblance to those of the Chalk. It is not that the same species are met with; for in some cases not one species is identically the same, but they belong to the same families, genera, and sections of genera, and sometimes are similarly characterised in such trifling points as mere superficial sculpture. Moreover, other forms, which are not found in the Chalk of Europe, but which occur in the formations either above or below, occur in the same order at these distant points of the world. In the several successive palæozoic formations of Russia, Western Europe and North America, a similar parallelism in the forms of life has been observed by several authors; so it is, according to Lyell, with the European and North American tertiary deposits. Even if the few fossil species which are common to the Old and New Worlds were kept wholly out of view, the general parallelism in the successive forms of life, in the palæozoic and tertiary stages, would still be manifest, and the several formations could be easily correlated.

These observations, however, relate to the marine inhabitants of the world: we have not sufficient data to judge whether the productions of the land and of fresh water at distant points change in the same parallel manner. We may doubt whether they have thus changed: if the *Megatherium*, *Mylodon*, *Macrauchenia*, and *Toxodon* had been brought to Europe from La Plata, without any information in regard to their geological position, no one would have suspected that they had co-existed with sea-shells all still living; but as these anomalous monsters co-existed with the *Mastodon* and *Horse*, it might at least have been inferred that they had lived during one of the later tertiary stages.

When the marine forms of life are spoken of as having changed simultaneously throughout the world, it must not be supposed that this expression relates to the same year, or even to the same century, or even that it has a very strict geological sense; for if all the marine animals now living in Europe, and all those that lived in Europe during the pleistocene period (a very remote period as measured by years, including the whole glacial epoch) were compared with those now existing in South America or in Australia, the most skilful naturalist would hardly be able to say whether the present or the pleistocene inhabitants of Europe resembled most closely those of the southern hemisphere. So, again, several highly competent observers maintain that the existing productions of the United States are more closely related to those which lived in Europe during certain late tertiary stages, than to the present inhabitants of Europe; and if this be so, it is evident that fossiliferous beds now deposited on the shores of North America would hereafter be liable to be classed with somewhat older European beds. Nevertheless, looking to a remotely future epoch, there can be little doubt that all the more modern *marine* formations, namely, the upper pliocene, the pleistocene and strictly modern beds of Europe, North and South America, and Australia, from containing fossil remains in some degree allied, and from not including those forms which are found only in the older underlying deposits, would be correctly ranked as simultaneous in a geological sense.

The fact of the forms of life changing simultaneously in the above large sense, at distant parts of the world, has greatly struck those admirable observers, MM. de Verneuil and d'Archiac. After referring to the parallelism of the palæozoic forms of life in various parts of Europe, they add, "If, struck by this strange sequence, we turn our attention to North America, and there discover a series of analogous phenomena, it will appear certain that all these modifications of species, their extinction, and the introduction of new ones, cannot be owing to mere changes in marine currents or other causes more or less local and temporary, but depend on general laws which govern the whole animal kingdom." M. Barrande has made forcible remarks to precisely the same effect. It is, indeed, quite futile to look to changes of currents, climate, or other physical conditions, as the cause of these great mutations in the forms of life throughout the world, under the most different climates. We must, as Barrande has remarked, look to some special law. We shall see this more clearly when we treat of the present distribution of organic beings, and find how slight is the relation between the physical conditions of various countries and the nature of their inhabitants.

This great fact of the parallel succession of the forms of life throughout the world, is explicable on the theory of natural selection. New species are formed by having some advantage over older forms; and the forms, which are already dominant, or have some advantage over the other forms in their own country, give birth to the greatest number of new varieties or incipient species. We have distinct evidence on this head, in the plants which are dominant, that is, which are commonest and most widely diffused, producing the greatest number of new varieties. It is also natural that the dominant, varying and far-spreading species, which have already invaded, to a certain extent, the territories of other species, should be those which would have the best chance of spreading still further, and of giving rise in new countries to other new varieties and species. The process of diffusion would often be very slow, depending on climatal and geographical changes, on strange accidents, and on the gradual acclimatization of new species to the various climates through which they might have to pass, but in the course of time the dominant forms would generally succeed in spreading and would ultimately prevail. The diffusion would, it is probable, be slower with the terrestrial inhabitants of distinct continents than with the marine inhabitants of the continuous sea. We might therefore expect to find, as we do find, a less strict degree of parallelism in the succession of the productions of the land than with those of the sea.

Thus, as it seems to me, the parallel, and, taken in a large sense, simultaneous, succession of the same forms of life throughout the world, accords well with the principle of new species having been formed by dominant species spreading widely and varying; the new species thus produced being themselves dominant, owing to their having had some advantage over their already dominant parents, as well as over other species; and again spreading, varying, and producing new forms. The old forms which are beaten and which yield their places to the new and victorious forms, will generally be allied in groups, from inheriting some inferiority in common; and, therefore, as new and improved groups spread throughout the world, old groups disappear from the world; and the succession of forms everywhere tends to correspond both in their first appearance and final disappearance.

There is one other remark connected with this subject worth making. I have given my reasons for believing that most of our great formations, rich in fossils, were deposited during periods of subsidence; and that blank intervals of vast duration, as far as fossils are concerned, occurred during the periods when the bed of the sea was either stationary or rising, and likewise when sediment was not thrown down quickly enough to embed and preserve organic remains. During these long and blank intervals I suppose that the inhabitants of each region underwent a considerable amount of modification and extinction, and that there was much migration from other parts of the world. As we

have reason to believe that large areas are affected by the same movement, it is probable that strictly contemporaneous formations have often been accumulated over very wide spaces in the same quarter of the world; but we are very far from having any right to conclude that this has invariably been the case, and that large areas have invariably been affected by the same movements. When two formations have been deposited in two regions during nearly, but not exactly, the same period, we should find in both, from the causes explained in the foregoing paragraphs, the same general succession in the forms of life; but the species would not exactly correspond; for there will have been a little more time in the one region than in the other for modification, extinction, and immigration.

I suspect that cases of this nature occur in Europe. Mr. Prestwich, in his admirable Memoirs on the eocene deposits of England and France, is able to draw a close general parallelism between the successive stages in the two countries; but when he compares certain stages in England with those in France, although he finds in both a curious accordance in the numbers of the species belonging to the same genera, yet the species themselves differ in a manner very difficult to account for considering the proximity of the two areas,— unless, indeed, it be assumed that an isthmus separated two seas inhabited by distinct, but contemporaneous faunas. Lyell has made similar observations on some of the later tertiary formations. Barrande, also, shows that there is a striking general parallelism in the successive Silurian deposits of Bohemia and Scandinavia; nevertheless he finds a surprising amount of difference in the species. If the several formations in these regions have not been deposited during the same exact periods,— a formation in one region often corresponding with a blank interval in the other,— and if in both regions the species have gone on slowly changing during the accumulation of the several formations and during the long intervals of time between them; in this case the several formations in the two regions could be arranged in the same order, in accordance with the general succession of the forms of life, and the order would falsely appear to be strictly parallel; nevertheless the species would not all be the same in the apparently corresponding stages in the two regions.

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Revision #1

Created 13 August 2019 13:14:41 by Textpedia

Updated 13 August 2019 13:14:57 by Textpedia