

On the sudden Appearance of whole Groups of allied Species.

The abrupt manner in which whole groups of species suddenly appear in certain formations, has been urged by several palæontologists — for instance, by Agassiz, Pictet, and Sedgwick — as a fatal objection to the belief in the transmutation of species. If numerous species, belonging to the same genera or families, have really started into life at once, the fact would be fatal to the theory of evolution through natural selection. For the development by this means of a group of forms, all of which are descended from some one progenitor, must have been an extremely slow process; and the progenitors must have lived long before their modified descendants. But we continually overrate the perfection of the geological record, and falsely infer, because certain genera or families have not been found beneath a certain stage, that they did not exist before that stage. In all cases positive palæontological evidence may be implicitly trusted; negative evidence is worthless, as experience has so often shown. We continually forget how large the world is, compared with the area over which our geological formations have been carefully examined; we forget that groups of species may elsewhere have long existed, and have slowly multiplied, before they invaded the ancient archipelagoes of Europe and the United States. We do not make due allowance for the enormous intervals of time which have elapsed between our consecutive formations,— longer perhaps in many cases than the time required for the accumulation of each formation. These intervals will have given time for the multiplication of species from some one parent-form: and in the succeeding formation, such groups or species will appear as if suddenly created.

I may here recall a remark formerly made, namely, that it might require a long succession of ages to adapt an organism to some new and peculiar line of life, for instance, to fly through the air; and consequently that the transitional forms would often long remain confined to some one region; but that, when this adaptation had once been effected, and a few species had thus acquired a great advantage over other organisms, a comparatively short time would be necessary to produce many divergent forms, which would spread rapidly and widely throughout the world. Professor Pictet, in his excellent Review of this work, in commenting on early transitional forms, and taking birds as an illustration, cannot see how the successive modifications of the anterior limbs of a supposed prototype could possibly have been of any advantage. But look at the penguins of the Southern Ocean; have not these birds their front limbs in this precise intermediate state of "neither true arms nor true wings"? Yet these birds hold their place victoriously in the battle for life; for they exist in infinite numbers and of many kinds. I do not suppose that we here see the real transitional grades through which the wings of birds have passed; but what special difficulty is there in believing that it might profit the modified descendants of the penguin, first to become enabled to flap along the surface of the sea like the logger-headed duck, and ultimately to rise from its surface and glide through the air?

I will now give a few examples to illustrate the foregoing remarks, and to show how liable we are to error in supposing that whole groups of species have suddenly been produced. Even in so short an interval as that between the first and second editions of Pictet's great work on Palæontology, published in 1844-46 and in 1853-57, the conclusions on the first appearance and disappearance of several groups of animals have been considerably modified; and a third edition would require still further changes. I may recall the well-known fact that in geological treatises, published not many years ago, mammals were always spoken of as having abruptly come in at the commencement of the tertiary

series. And now one of the richest known accumulations of fossil mammals belongs to the middle of the secondary series; and true mammals have been discovered in the new red sandstone at nearly the commencement of this great series. Cuvier used to urge that no monkey occurred in any tertiary stratum; but now extinct species have been discovered in India, South America and in Europe, as far back as the miocene stage. Had it not been for the rare accident of the preservation of footsteps in the new red sandstone of the United States, who would have ventured to suppose that no less than at least thirty different bird-like animals, some of gigantic size, existed during that period? Not a fragment of bone has been discovered in these beds. Not long ago, palæontologists maintained that the whole class of birds came suddenly into existence during the eocene period; but now we know, on the authority of Professor Owen, that a bird certainly lived during the deposition of the upper greensand; and still more recently, that strange bird, the Archeopteryx, with a long lizard-like tail, bearing a pair of feathers on each joint, and with its wings furnished with two free claws, has been discovered in the oolitic slates of Solenhofen. Hardly any recent discovery shows more forcibly than this how little we as yet know of the former inhabitants of the world.

I may give another instance, which, from having passed under my own eyes has much struck me. In a memoir on Fossil Sessile Cirripedes, I stated that, from the large number of existing and extinct tertiary species; from the extraordinary abundance of the individuals of many species all over the world, from the Arctic regions to the equator, inhabiting various zones of depths, from the upper tidal limits to fifty fathoms; from the perfect manner in which specimens are preserved in the oldest tertiary beds; from the ease with which even a fragment of a valve can be recognised; from all these circumstances, I inferred that, had sessile cirripedes existed during the secondary periods, they would certainly have been preserved and discovered; and as not one species had then been discovered in beds of this age, I concluded that this great group had been suddenly developed at the commencement of the tertiary series. This was a sore trouble to me, adding, as I then thought, one more instance of the abrupt appearance of a great group of species. But my work had hardly been published, when a skilful palæontologist, M. Bosquet, sent me a drawing of a perfect specimen of an unmistakable sessile cirripede, which he had himself extracted from the chalk of Belgium. And, as if to make the case as striking as possible, this cirripede was a *Chthamalus*, a very common, large, and ubiquitous genus, of which not one species has as yet been found even in any tertiary stratum. Still more recently, a *Pyrgoma*, a member of a distinct subfamily of sessile cirripedes, has been discovered by Mr. Woodward in the upper chalk; so that we now have abundant evidence of the existence of this group of animals during the secondary period.

The case most frequently insisted on by palæontologists of the apparently sudden appearance of a whole group of species, is that of the teleostean fishes, low down, according to Agassiz, in the Chalk period. This group includes the large majority of existing species. But certain Jurassic and Triassic forms are now commonly admitted to be teleostean; and even some palæozoic forms have thus been classed by one high authority. If the teleosteans had really appeared suddenly in the northern hemisphere at the commencement of the chalk formation, the fact would have been highly remarkable; but it would not have formed an insuperable difficulty, unless it could likewise have been shown that at the same period the species were suddenly and simultaneously developed in other quarters of the world. It is almost superfluous to remark that hardly any fossil-fish are known from south of the equator; and by running through Pictet's Palæontology it will be seen that very few species are known from several formations in Europe. Some few families of fish now have a confined range; the teleostean fishes might formerly have had a similarly confined range, and after having been largely developed in some one sea, have spread widely. Nor have we any right to suppose that the seas of the world have always been so freely open from south to north as they are at present. Even at this day, if

the Malay Archipelago were converted into land, the tropical parts of the Indian Ocean would form a large and perfectly enclosed basin, in which any great group of marine animals might be multiplied; and here they would remain confined, until some of the species became adapted to a cooler climate, and were enabled to double the southern capes of Africa or Australia, and thus reach other and distant seas.

From these considerations, from our ignorance of the geology of other countries beyond the confines of Europe and the United States, and from the revolution in our palæontological knowledge effected by the discoveries of the last dozen years, it seems to me to be about as rash to dogmatize on the succession of organic forms throughout the world, as it would be for a naturalist to land for five minutes on a barren point in Australia, and then to discuss the number and range of its productions.

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