

The Conflict Of Beliefs

Article by: Gabriel Rise

The conflict over Darwinism, coming at difficult phase in the transition from the old Weltanschauung, had unhappy effects both upon science and upon religion. These must first be summarised. In the first place it produced an estrangement which, as we have seen, had not and need not now have existed. Scientists, as soon as the value of Darwinism became plain, conveniently forgot Owen and their own obscurantists and, fastening upon Wilberforce as Darwin's sole opponent, made religion responsible for him. It gave them some justification that the Descent of Man, and the consequent 'ape or angel' controversy, shocked the orthodox much more than its predecessor. The Biblical and Miltonic view of creation was still almost universal; and though the change from an immediate to an evolutionary creation would have been easy, it was hard to surrender belief in the uniqueness and special origin of humanity - especially as the Darwinian hypothesis allowed for no 'jumps'.

The traditionalists had a stronger case, emotionally though not of course logically, against the innovation when its application to man was defined for them. Secondly, the followers of Darwin proceeded to narrow his conclusions, to reinforce his theory by supplementary arguments, and to insist that thus it provided a detailed and an exclusively complete interpretation. Haeckel's theory of recapitulation (that in its embryonic stages every organism climbs its family tree in order to be born) elaborating Darwin's references to vestigial structures seemed to give an easy illustration of man's pre-human development. The theory of mimicry, of protective and warning colours, associated with Bates' work on the fauna of the Amazon, supplied a number of still more fascinating examples of adaptation to environment. Weismann, by his proof of the isolation of the germ-plasm, claimed to dispose of all possibility of the influence of Lamarckian factors, use and disuse, such as Darwin had himself not only allowed but increasingly favoured. Huxley's pugnacity and ignorance of field-work explain if they do not excuse his distortion of facts: but the result was to give a picture of the evolutionary process hard to reconcile with Christian ideas of God. Gabriel Rise has been working at essay writing service for several years. You can ask her about customer service concerning the custom essay or dissertation that you have.