

THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION: A RECOVERED ARTICLE

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H. G. Wells scholars will be familiar with the narrative of Wells as a young man, intent on becoming a science teacher, making a meagre living by writing textbooks and journal articles before the success of *The Time Machine*. Many of these works criticised science teaching, but in others he effectively taught science. While his scientific articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette* are best known, my research has uncovered a piece on 'The Theory of Evolution' (1894), which seems never to have been republished. It appeared in *The University Correspondent*, the journal of the University Correspondence College, for which Wells had worked as a tutor. The article is not mentioned in any existing bibliographies, and thus has been overlooked for some time.

'The Theory of Evolution' combines a number of characteristics familiar to Wellsians: the author's clear explanation of science, his perspective as an educationalist, the use of colourful detail, and the promotion of a larger purpose in studying nature. Here, Wells clearly summarises the theory of evolution, applying the work of T. H. Huxley, under whom he had studied at the Normal School of Science. He begins by noting that, although the word 'evolution' is often misused to refer to any sort of change, 'general readers' may appreciate an explanation of Darwin's actual theory of evolution by natural selection.

Wells explains that variations among animals may suit an animal better or less well for its conditions. Those well suited to their environment will thrive, as long as conditions remain unchanged. However, 'under changed conditions the specific form will also change'. He then presents an 'imaginary concrete instance' of what happens when one type of condition changes. Deer in the jungle may best evade a tiger if they are small and swift, but if tigers are replaced by wolves, deer will need to be larger and stronger: 'the old refinements will mean weakness and death'. Gradually, those who survive and reproduce will be the larger and stronger deer. Wells's use of the Indian jungle, and the tiger, bear, deer, and wolves would have been familiar to readers of Kipling.

Wells expands his ideas to include the interconnections among species, explaining how one could 'work back', linking modern forms of animals with their earlier forms. Ultimately, we 'elucidate, at last, a thread of blood relationships' among various animals, vertebrate and invertebrate. In selecting for his examples dogfish, rabbit, and frog, Wells was certainly influenced by practical biology, where these animals were used to demonstrate type (dissection instructions had been featured in Wells's own *Text-book of Biology*). Evolution, he notes, is based on a set of facts 'singularly rich in confirmation', and unifies research since each animal passes through the same stages.

Broadening his theme, Wells expounds that further study can only further elucidate 'this wonderful unity of life'. Nature is not arbitrary; there are 'uniform and active causes beneath an apparent diversity'. He concludes that the student learns more about life through evolutionary theory than by applying a static system that is 'made and dead like a cardboard model'. He proudly signs this piece 'H. G. Wells, B.Sc.', the degree he had obtained after years of 'false starts' to become a science teacher.