

SCIENCE

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 1910

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THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF NATURALISTS CHANCE OR PURPOSE IN THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF ADAPTATION¹

THE naturalist lives surrounded by fellow men, whose ideas concerning the origin of living things are still totally at variance with his own. To them creation is a historical drama, and with the act of creation its *purpose* was fulfilled. The naturalist lives surrounded by fellow animals, that show on the whole no change except the chance fluctuations of the seasons or of the years. They give to ordinary observation every evidence of permanency, but no evidence of evolution, and only the highly specialized student reports at times the appearance of new forms.

It is surprising, with these deadening influences always present, that we should sometimes fail to fully realize that evolution is a process now taking place in the same way that it has taken place in the past; that it is a process that we can study directly; something that possibly we can control and direct, and upon our knowledge of which the destiny of the human race may depend.

Convinced that evolution has taken place, admitting that it is still going on, nevertheless the position of the naturalist in regard to the causes of evolution is far from satisfactory and most unsatisfactory concerning the *origin and evolution of adaptation*.

The evidence that evolution has taken place we owe primarily to the paleontologist, but it is historical evidence, at best,

¹Presidential address at the dinner of the American Society of Naturalists in Boston, December 29, 1909.