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THE HISTORY OF EVOLUTIONARY THOUGHT¹ AS RECORDED IN MEETINGS OF THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION

Professor Sir EDWARD B. POULTON, D.Sc., LL.D., F.R.S.
HOPE PROFESSOR OF ZOOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

SIR WILLIAM THOMSON, in his address at Edinburgh in 1871, said that "the real origin of the British Association" was given in the words of a letter written by David Brewster to John Phillips on February 23, 1831, a few months before the first meeting: "The principal object of the Society would be to make the cultivators of science acquainted with each other, to stimulate one another to new exertions, and to bring the objects of science more before the public eye, and to take measures for advancing its interests and accelerating its progress." That the time was fully ripe for the birth of the association is made very clear by the words written by John Keble to a friend, referring to the D.C.L. degrees conferred, at the Oxford meeting in 1832, on David Brewster, Robert Brown, John Dalton

and Michael Faraday: "The Oxford Doctors have truckled sadly to the spirit of the times in receiving the hodge-podge of philosophers as they did"—an opinion on which Lord Salisbury commented at the Oxford meeting in 1894: "It is amusing at this distance of time, to note the names of the hodge-podge of philosophers whose academical distinctions so sorely vexed Mr. Keble's gentle spirit." It is not only amusing but pathetic that such words should have been used by a revered member of a university which had done splendid service for science, as has been so well shown in Dr. R. T. Gunther's volumes.²

Faced by the serious duty of preparing this address, I felt that the best hope of interesting you would be to choose a subject which has received special attention at our meetings. I have selected the progress of thought on organic evolution as it may be followed in addresses,

¹ Address of the president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, given at Nottingham, September 1, 1937.

² "Early Science in Oxford," vols. i-xi.

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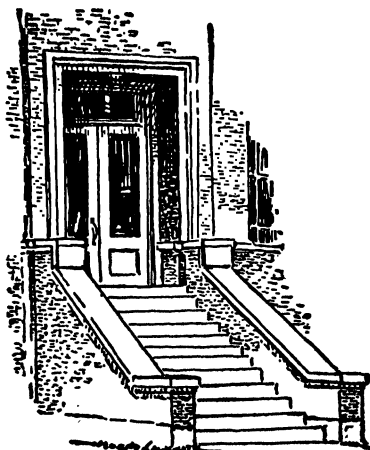
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