

EVOLUTION BEFORE DARWIN

It would come as a shock to those who imagine that evolution began with Darwin if they were to look into Disraeli's novel Tancred, published more than 20 years before Darwin's Origin of Species appeared. In this book a fashionable lady speaks as follows: "You know, all is development. The principle is perpetually going on. First, there was nothing, then there was something; then-- I forget the next--I think there were shells, then fishes; then we came--let me see--did we come next? Never mind that; we came at last. And at the next change there will be something very superior to us--something with wings. Ah! that's it: we were fishes, and I believe we shall be crows. But you must read it." When her companion replies, "I do not believe I ever was a fish," the lady continues: "Oh! but it is all proved...you understand, it is all science; it is not like those books in which one said one thing and another the contrary, and both may be wrong. Everything is proved--by geology, you know."

In having his characters speak in this fashion, Disraeli was reflecting the contemporary great interest in a book called Vestiges of Creation that had appeared in 1844. This book presented a thorough-going idea of evolution. It was published anonymously and many guesses were made about its authorship, some