

copy for 1923 file

c/r ADM: EX Bd: Projects: Or-
ganic Evolution

October 9, 1925

Dear Doctor Merriam:

I am sending you, enclosed, the Report of the Committee on Organic Evolution with the Statement which accompanied it. These were presented direct to the Academy at the business session on April 23, 1923, and the following action was taken:

"Moved: That the report be considered confidential and referred to the Council of the Academy for action in case they are called upon for such a statement. Adopted."

Moved: That the committee be continued.

Adopted. "

Sincerely yours,

[Signed PAUL BROCKETT]

Dr. John C. Merriam
Carnegie Institution
Washington

Assistant Secretary

1923

Report of Committee on Organic Evolution

The vote of the Academy, under which this Committee was created, reads thus:

"That the President be authorized to appoint a committee including a single representative from each Section of the Academy to consider what public action, if any, is advisable for the National Academy of Sciences to take in regard to the organized campaign against the theory of organic evolution, and to report upon it at the next meeting."

By appointment of the President its personnel is as follows:

Messrs. James R. Angell
W. W. Campbell
Henry Crew
C. B. Davenport
Gano Dunn
L. R. Jones
E. H. Moore
A. A. Noyes
W. H. Welch
John M. Clarke

The Committee has recognized the fact that its first business was to determine the attitude of its majority toward the general proposition as to the advisability of any action whatsoever on the part of the Academy. The discussion of this matter, carried out under the disadvantages of rather large geographical magnitudes, naturally led to the expression that the determination of even the preliminary point on which a recommendation was expected by the Academy would involve a prior notion as to the character of the report to be made. These points have therefore been debated and discussed together.

In the first interchange of thoughts it became quite evident that there was a degree of reluctance on the part of the majority of the Committee to enter this arena at all, under any form of expression. The sharp edge of the anti-evolution propaganda has very clearly been felt

more by those who are intimately associated with educational activities; less, I should say, by men whose associations are more closely restricted to their scientific work. Personally I may add that with my own lot cast close among the concerns of public education, I am made aware of the widespread apprehension which regards an outburst of the anti-evolution propaganda in the legislature of any State as quite possible. It is, however, not my concern as Chairman of this Committee to argue the merits of the issue, but to say further that after a somewhat protracted and fuller discussion of the whole subject the attitude of the members of the Committee on the question presented to them has taken on an essential majority agreement to this degree, namely; 1) the Academy may wisely take a carefully formulated action on this subject; 2) this action may with propriety take the form of a brief but comprehensive statement of the attitude of the Academy; 3) this statement should be held in readiness for use if a more acute exigency should arise; 4) that this committee be continued.

JOHN M. CLARKE
chairman

Submitted to the Council with the report of the
Committee on Organic Evolution.

STATEMENT.

It may never be possible for mankind to ascertain the entire or exact truth regarding the procedures of Nature and the underlying laws of life, but it is certain that the degree of approach to this truth is a measure of our civilization.

The knowledge of controlling and supreme law does not come by some inspiration to the ignorant; no prominence of place in community or state or church can impart it. It must come and can come only by long continued research and through special and refined acquaintance with the complicated factors which enter into the causation of every natural phenomenon.

By arduous efforts, little by little, some of the underlying general laws of Nature have come within human knowledge and to the acceptance of our understanding. With the enlargement of human knowledge and the passage of time these laws have become clarified and their operation better understood. Beyond the conclusions reached through competent study of natural law by cautious and highly trained investigators, it is not possible for anyone to go, except as the searcher after the truth himself pushes further ahead in his quest.

Yet each discovery of natural law has aroused the antagonism of the uncomprehending community and such groups within it as are more content with mystery than knowledge. The conception of the rotundity of the earth's figure dates back two thousand years; very slowly it fought its way into the consciousness and understanding of mankind. Today probably one-half of the world's population still believes that the earth is flat. The progress of what seems to us today so simple and elementary a conception as this, has been repeated in the case of almost every great discovery of natural law. No intelligent person believes that the sun, moon, planets and stars move about the earth as a center. It is in fact a part of every education to learn the struggles with prepossession, tradition, ignorance and fancy against which this conception of the solar system and of the universe has forced its way into recognition.

There has been no more magnificent and far-reaching generalization of a natural law than that commonly known as the doctrine of evolution, which involves, amongst its other elements, the recognition of the continuity of life and the development, through the ages, of living beings in structure and function. The conception is older than the Christian era; little by little it, too, has forced its way into understanding and acceptance by the educated members of every civilized community. The expression of it in general terms is the result

of the skilled investigations of thousands of the most competent students of living nature. There are none so competent as they to formulate such an expression of natural truth. To refuse to accept this law, to deny it, to openly lampoon it, is the expression of ignorance, involuntary or unconfessed.

In the pursuit of the truth leading to the demonstration of natural law there is a very certain high road; it is the high road of Education. It is the one road that opens to the acceptance of this magnificent generalization of organic evolution. The truth is sacred. To impugn and deny it is to stultify Research and Education. Attempts to block the avenues of Education through prejudice, intolerance or intellectual incompetency, menace the progress of humanity and civilization.

