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## [“We May Well Suppose” Redux](#) [5]

Relation of Evolution and Darwinism to the  
Question of Origins

In “Who Was the Occupant?” ([part 1](#) [6], [part 2](#) [7], [part 3](#) [8]),

I investigated a claim that the expression “we may well suppose” occurs over eight hundred times in Darwin’s works *On the Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*. That claim, of course, is plainly bogus; the phrase would have to appear about twice every three pages for the claim to be true, which would make it a conspicuous verbal tic on Darwin’s part. Moreover, Darwin apparently never used the expression in print, at least in his own words. (In “Observations on the Parallel Roads of Glen Roy” he quotes Charles Lyell using it.) Nevertheless, the claim is common, probably owing to its occurrence in “Evolutionism in the Pulpit,” written by the pseudonymous “An Occupant of the Pew,” originally published in 1911 and later included in *The Fundamentals* (1910–1915).

I then said that “Evolutionism in the Pulpit” seemed to be the original source of the claim. Recently, however, while searching for something entirely different, I stumbled across the following passage:

Mr. Darwin was a mighty man in his way. His “Origin of Species” and “Descent of Man” are

packed from cover to cover with an array of facts that show an amazing amount of careful inquiry, patient research[,] and wonderfully extensive reading. Yet, notwithstanding all this, I may say by way of personal testimony, that I think no other book ever read by myself can compare with the former of these two in the vast number of uncertainties and surmises that it represents. It abounds in such words as perhaps, probable, probably, apparently, possibly, may be [*sic*], if, etc. Again and again we meet such doubtful expressions as: I can not [*sic*] doubt, I think, I believe, it appears to me almost certain, we must admit, I am fully convinced, we may reasonably suppose, etc. Many assertions are made to the end that things seem so, appear to be, may be, must be, might be, and the like. In my copy I have counted *no fewer than* 855 of these conjectures, assumptions, surmisings, etc. (emphasis in original)

The passage appeared in G. L. Young's "Relation of Evolution and Darwinism to the Question of Origins," published in volume 11 of *The Bible Student and Teacher* in 1909, two years before "Evolutionism in the Pulpit."

Since Young wasn't fixated on the exact phrase "we may well suppose," his version of the claim, like [William A. Williams's](#) [9], isn't plainly bogus. And the amount of time and effort he lavished on providing the details suggests that he may not have been bluffing: maybe he really counted. (The treatment is not so detailed as to enable the reader to replicate the experiment, however.) On the other hand, he was clearly trying too hard when he attempted similarly to criticize the solitary [diagram](#) [10] Darwin included in the *Origin*, writing:

Now, in the explanation that accompanies this diagram, there are at least 3 assumptions, 7 assumed probabilities, about 12 ifs, may-bes, predictions, etc., some 25 statements resting on no proven basis, and 25 suppositions. Thus we have about 75 assumptions or uncertainties, but scarcely a single fact, to prop up a theory!

Young evidently failed to realize that the diagram isn't intended to provide evidence at all. As David N. Reznick explains in [The](#) [11] [Origin](#) [11] [Then and Now](#) [11] (2010), Darwin's figure "begins with an imaginary genus that consists of species A-L arrayed along a horizontal axis that represents some imaginary form of environmental variation". It's a schematic diagram of patterns that might, but are not claimed to, exist in nature, provided only to aid the understanding of the reader of the *Origin*.

In any case, I am now inclined to credit Young rather with the Occupant for introducing the claim about Darwin's expressions of uncertainty, and I'll stick with Young until and unless a prior instance is located. But who was Young? *The Bible Student and Teacher* identifies him only as the Reverend G. L. Young of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. I looked in Ronald L. Numbers's monumental *The Creationists* (1992), finding only a passing reference to Young's paper with no real discussion of the author himself—and Numbers is in fact the only scholar of the creationism/evolution controversy who seems to have mentioned Young at all. That of itself was a clue, though. Numbers was raised as a Seventh-Day Adventist and is familiar with the antievolution literature of that denomination: was Young a Seventh-Day Adventist pastor?

No, but I was close. Young seems to have been George Lindley Young (1866–1944), a minister in the Advent Christian Church, a sibling to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. According to the unsigned obituary [reproduced](#) [12] at findagrave.com, Young was born in Nova Scotia and served as a pastor in various Advent churches there and in the northeastern United States (including Pittsfield,

Massachusetts). He was also a prolific writer whose books included *Crowning Hope* (1893), *Doctrines of the Book of Acts* (1901), *Fundamental Christology* (1906), and *Tim and Jim: A Modern Fad in Practical Operation* (1927). I don't see any evidence that he published further on evolution, but manuscripts of his on the subject are apparently [archived](#) [13] at Aurora University, which was originally affiliated with the Advent Christian Church. Is anyone looking for a term paper topic?

[+ read](#) [5]

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