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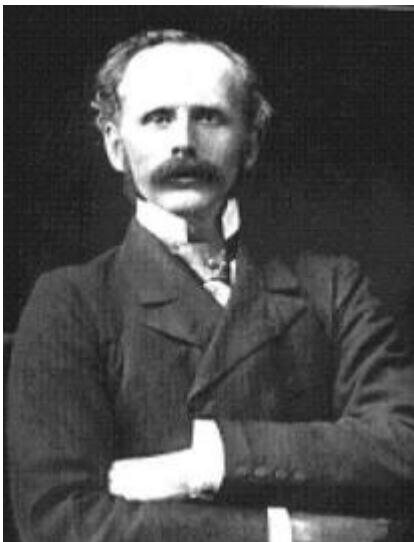
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07.24.2017

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For quite a while now, I have been on the lookout for “The Last Word of Great Scientists on Evolution,” a 1925 antievolution pamphlet by J. J. Sims. I was pleased, then, to find a

copy recently. Sims was apparently a “World-Known Lecturer on ‘The Bible and Science’” as well as the author of “Pearls from the Deep,” “The History of Satan,” “We Drew the Fire,” etc., according to the title page. The pamphlet isn’t entirely unknown—writing in *The American Mercury* in 1928, Maynard Shipley took a swipe at it, and Ronald L. Numbers mentions it in a footnote in *The Creationists* (1992) on account of its “inconsistent” response to George McCready Price—but it’s not exactly famous, either. Nor is Sims, although later in 1925 he was serving as the Field Secretary of the Bryan Bible League, founded in memory of the fallen William Jennings Bryan.

Why was I so curious to see this particular obscure work? Well, as trivial as it sounds, I was curious about the ambiguity in its title. Was “the last word” to be understood as the final, conclusive, and binding verdict on evolution from the assembled host of great scientists? Or was it to be understood as their rattling deathbed croaks? My guess, naturally, was that it was the former. For there is—as I have often described here before—a long-standing creationist tradition of parading a series of quotations from various and sundry scientists, scholars, and whackadoodles in the service of testifying to the scientific bankruptcy and moral squalor of evolution. But I couldn’t exclude the possibility of the latter, either, since there is also a long-standing creationist tradition of repeating a dubious story about Darwin’s deathbed recantation of evolution.

Lo and behold: “The Last Word of Great Scientists on Evolution” provides both! Sims replicates passages from H. C. Morton, [William Bateson](#) [6], [W. H. Thomson](#) [7], [Robert Etheridge](#) [8], and [Lionel Beale](#) [9]—and that’s just on the verso of the title page! As the hyperlinks indicate, I’ve discussed four out of these five passages before. The fifth is hardly worth discussing: Morton is quoted as writing, in *The Bankruptcy of Evolution* (1925), “Darwinism is dead, and will soon be buried without hope of resurrection. But without Darwinism Evolution is the mere empty shell of a venerable speculation.” Whether or not Sims quoted him correctly, Morton was not a scientist but a fundamentalist Methodist (he resigned from the ministry in 1920) in Britain, and—in any case—a poor prophet.

That’s the last word in the sense of a final, conclusive, and binding verdict, but opposite it appears the rattling deathbed croak of Darwin himself, as [related](#) [10] by Lady Hope: “I was a young man with unformed ideas. ... People made a religion out of them.” So far so good. But to my surprise, there was a second deathbed recantation in “The Last Word of Great Scientists on Evolution”! According to Sims, “Prof. Drummond was the Apostle of Theistic evolution. His book, ‘The Ascent of Man,’ was turned down by the evolutionists of his day. On his death-bed he said to Sir Wm. Dawson: ‘I am going away back to the Book to believe it and receive it, as I did at the first. I can live no longer on uncertainties.’” (The last two sentences are set as a block quote, but I’m not going to bother to follow the typography here.)

Sims is of course talking about Henry Drummond (above; 1851–1897), whom James R. Moore describes in *The Post-Darwinian Controversies* (1979) as “the Scottish naturalist and Free Churchman” and, in *The Ascent of Man* (1894), “[Herbert] Spencer’s ardent disciple, finding evidence of natural law in the spiritual world.” In the last chapter of the book, Drummond rejects the idea of reconciling evolution and Christianity on the grounds that they are identical, catechizing: “What is Evolution? A method of creation. What is its object? To make more perfect living beings. What is Christianity? A method of creation. What is its object? To make more perfect living beings. Through what does Evolution work? Through Love. Through what does Christianity work? Through Love. Evolution and Christianity have the same Author, the same end, the same spirit.”

Incidentally, *The Ascent of Man* is sometimes credited with introducing the handy concept of “the God of the gaps,” although the actual phrase seems to be C. A. Coulson’s in *Science and Christian Belief* (1955).

Toward the end of his book, Drummond complains, “There are reverent minds who ceaselessly scan the fields of Nature and the books of Science in search of gaps—gaps which they will fill up with God. As if God lived in gaps? ... If God is only to be left to the gaps in our knowledge, where shall we be when these gaps are filled up? And if they are never to be filled up, is God only to be found in the disorders of the world?” For my part, I’m going to leave a gap here, in order to address only in [part 2](#) <sup>[11]</sup> the question of whether Drummond in fact recanted on his deathbed as claimed in “The Last Word of Great Scientists on Evolution.”

[+ read](#) <sup>[5]</sup>

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