WILD FLOWERS: A PROBLEM FOR EVOLUTION

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According to the inclusive explanation of evolution by natural selection, wild flowers developed by chance variation. Evolutionists postulate that flowers came from changes in leaves. A truly vivid imagination is required to visualize flowers of Dutchman's Breeches developing by chance from a leafy branch, especially in the absence of any leaf branches in this wild flower. Evolutionists reject purpose on the part of the Creator because of a philosophy, but not because of their observations. Evolution by natural selection cannot be used to adequately explain the vast interdependence of living things.

When the chill winds of spring vie with warm, sunny days we look in corners and nooks of the woods for the bright faces of wild flowers. While they cannot assure us that snow will not return, we feel certain that warm skies and green grass are on their way. Using food stored in roots or bulbs, these tiny plants push up leaves and flowers very promptly while the trees still have no leaves to intercept sunshine from them.

Let us enquire how these tiny organisms attained their present attractive state. According to the inclusive explanation of evolution by natural selection they developed by chance variation. Quoting Darwin:

> Nothing at first can appear more difficult to believe than that the more complex organs and instincts have been perfected, not by means superior to, though analogous with, human reason, but by the accumulation of innumerable slight variations, each good for the individual possessor. Nevertheless, this difficulty, though appearing to imagination insuperably great, cannot be considered real if we admit the following propositions, namely. that all parts of the organization offer, at least, individual differences—that there is a struggle for existence leading to the preservation of profitable deviations of structure or instinct-and, lastly, that gradations in the state of perfection of each organ may have existed each good of its kind. The truth of these propositions cannot, I think, be disputed.[1]

Utilitarian Changes vs. Stable Genes

Such utilitarian changes, accumulated over thousands of years, were thought to account for the present structures of plants. But in the middle of the nineteenth century only one man, Gregor Mendel, knew much about the action of genes, and Charles Darwin knew nothing of his work.

We now know that genes are stable and the rare changes which do occur in them do not add anything which would build higher species.

> Most genes are exceedingly stable. This applies both to normal "wild-type" genes and to genes which have arisen by mutation. The natural mutation rate is very low. Many species have remained much the same for long geologic ages. The brachiopods among animals and the seaweeds and others among plants are examples of organisms in which almost no changes are observed in present-day species as compared with fossils.[2]

Returning to the nineteenth century theory, a plant with a simple, green body (a thallus) happened to develop stems with branches, which happened to become flattened into leaves. Thus, it could catch more sunlight and have an advantage in the struggle for existence. It is postulated:

(1) that at the tip of a branch, spores were formed and some chanced to be enlarged by storing food, thus becoming seeds;

(2) that leaves on this branch were changed into carpels, stamens, petals, and sepals respectively;

(3) that petals which happened to enlarge and develop color attract insects which carry pollen from one plant to another;

(4) and that flowers which happen to have sweet juice (nectar) also attract insects, which cross one variety with another (the basis of hybrid vigor).

Useless variation also occurred but such plants were lost in the struggle for existence.

A Certain Species Considered

Now let us ask how well this glittering generality applies in concrete species. The Dutchman's Breeches, *Dicentra cucullaria,* is a perennial herb which thrives in deep humus (see Figure 1). The compound leaves grow up directly from bulbs. The flower stalks are scapes, that is, they grow up from the bulbs without leaves, and the flower cluster is a raceme.

Now look at the flower itself. The sepals are very small. There are four petals, two of which are slender but the other two look like the legs of fancy breeches and thus give the name to the flower. This species seems to be self-pollinated since the stamens and pistil are near each other. There is no nectar, and bees seldom visit the flower.

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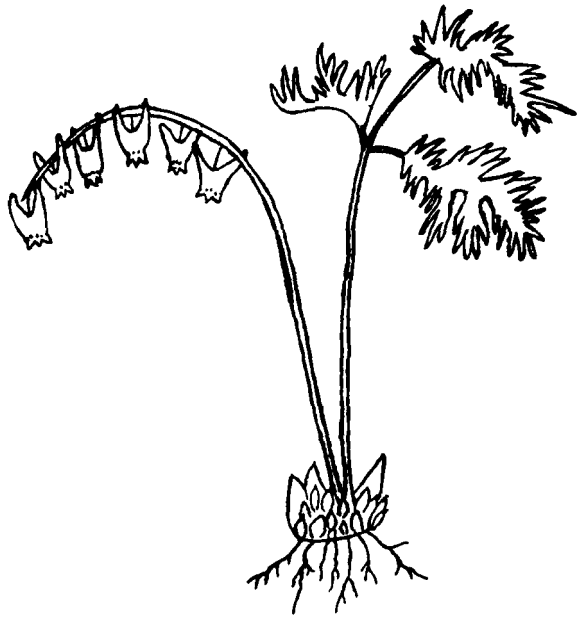

Figure 1. Dutchman's Breeches *Dicentra cucullaria*

It would require a lively imagination to visualize a leafy branch developing by chance, utilitarian changes into such a flower, especially in this plant *where there are no leafy branches.* Another difficulty in this explanation is that we find no intervening forms of plants either in the woods or in the rock strata.

The principal utilitarian value of flower color, odor, and nectar seems to be cross pollination. Some flowers are formed so as to favor receiving pollen from another plant rather than from its own stamens. For instance, the pistil may be longer than the stamens, such that the visiting insect touches it first and places pollen upon it from another flower. Or some stamens and pistils mature at different times, making self-pollination impossible.

But these are only special cases for in many plants, wheat, beans, and peas, for instance, pollen from the stamens regularly fertilizes the ovules of the same flower. It is hard to see how any utilitarian process such as natural selection built up the flowers of beans and peas. (And if this is not enough difficulty, consider the dandelion, in which many seeds develop by parthenogenesis, having had no union with pollen.)

Evolution vs. Purpose

The theory of evolution by natural selection may look reasonable as a whole, but we learn in mathematics that the whole is made up of its parts. If the parts of a theory do not contribute to the general idea, then the whole theory is defective and untenable. In a freshman course, the theory of evolution often is more attractive than in an advanced course because fewer exceptions are encountered.

Most evolutionists rule out purpose on the part of the Creator; not because of their observations however, but because of a philosophy which they prefer. It suits their bent of mind to believe in materialism and utilitarianism. But having espoused such a philosophy it is hard to account for beauty, and even harder to account for altruism.

We say that bees are attracted by the beauty of flowers, but why not say that grazing animals also are attracted, making natural selection work against beauty? Neither statement can be substantiated.

There is reality in the beautiful purple color of a raspberry cane just as much as in the thorns which are supposed to protect it, but natural selection does not account for this color. Again, what utilitarian theory can account for the striking colors of autumn leaves? The yellow is explained by the loss of chlorophyll leaving xanthophyll; but what is the utility of the bold, red anthocyanin, except to beautify the landscape?

When faced with altruism in nature the evolutionist is in difficulty, for his theory is based upon self interest. He may reply that some altruism is only apparent, for fruits pay animals for delivering seeds to favorable planting places. This is true in many cases, but it is hard to see such value in a squash and impossible to see it in cotton. The fibers do not transport cotton seeds but rather hold them. In many other species the fruits and seeds are more lavish than needed to perpetuate the kind.

In another respect, the oxygen which plants give off in their food-making process does not help them but is of great value to animals. Conversely, plants use the carbon dioxide which animals breathe out. Bacteria of decay perform a valuable service to nature by changing dead plants into soil; indeed the very best of soil. These organisms do not consciously try to help some body, but the world is so planned that this aid goes on naturally. Evolution by natural selection, based as it is upon selfish struggle, stands silent before these important natural processes.

Let us recognize that God made plants beautiful, and formed them in such a way that they serve other living things in addition to themselves. He made an interesting wealth of variety just as we should expect a personal Creator to do.

References

[1]Darwin. Charles. The origin of species. New York. Colliers. Library of Universal Literature, Part I. Vol. 2, p. 276.

[2]Snyder, L. H. and P. R. David. 1957. The principles of heredity. New York, Heath, p. 349.