ARISTOGENESIS, THE CREATIVE PRINCIPLE IN THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

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As the title of his epoch-making work Darwin chose “The Origin of Species” (1859) because, as conceived by Linnaeus (1735), “species” was the ultimate unit of creation in the animal and plant world. Nullae specieæ novae was the battle cry of the conservatives of pre-Darwinian days, but what Darwin devoted his life to was the origin not of species but of adaptations, of which species are simply the by-products.

Mechanical adaptation was the oriflamme from Empedocles (496–435 B.C.), the father of the evolution idea, through Anaxagoras, Aeschylyus, Aristotle and Plato, in forming what may be called the proto-Darwinian “chance hypothesis” as well as the proto-Lamarckian “inheritance of acquired adaption hypothesis.” The progressive improvement or regressive degeneration of human and animal mechanisms were the guideposts to the use and disuse inheritance speculations from the naturalists of Greece and Rome to Erasmus Darwin and Lamarek, the formulator of the “Lamarckian hypothesis.”

Osborn, too, for the past forty-three years a hunter of fossil titanotheres, of fossil mastodonts and elephants, concerned with the origin of the masterful horns of the titanotheres; in the elephants of the superb tusks, of the marvelous probosces, of the supreme mechanical adaptation of the great grinders which grind uninterruptedly for over a century, loves to feel that in part at least he has answered Aristotle’s question: “What then, hinders but that the parts in nature may also thus arise? For instance, that the...