

AN EXPERIMENT WITH LECTURES ON EVOLUTION IN CHATTANOOGA

WYMAN R. GREEN, UNIVERSITY OF CHATTANOOGA

Upon the request of the editor of this journal I am glad to give its readers the following information about the lectures on evolution which I had the pleasure of giving last winter to a small group of Chattanooga citizens at the University of Chattanooga.

Ever since the Dayton evolution trial in 1925 friends and citizens of Chattanooga have asked me to give a few lectures on this subject to the people of the city at a time available for them, that is, outside of our customary class-room schedule. Last winter I organized such a course independent of any assistance from the University, except permission to use one of the lecture rooms. I used several means for gaining publicity for the course.

(1) The newspapers: Paid advertisements in the two newspapers of the City. The *Chattanooga Times* showed special interest in my undertaking, discussing it once in a feature story and once in an editorial.

(2) Distribution of small cards which indicated the purpose and other data of the course as follows:

INFORMATION

CONCERNING THE COURSE OF EVENING LECTURES ON EVOLUTION GIVEN BY
DR. GREEN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHATTANOOGA

DATES—March 18, April 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29.

TIME—8 P. M. sharp.

PLACE—The Assembly Room, second floor of the main building.

NATURE—Informational, explanatory, given in non-technical language, each lecture illustrated by lantern slides, opportunity for questions.

OUTLINE OF THE LECTURES

- I. The general theory or principle. Adaptation of environment for life. Adaptation of life to environment.
- II. Evidences on which the theory is based. The fossil record. How the facts are obtained.
- III. Other evidences. Embryology. Comparative anatomy.
- IV. Experimental breeding. Mules. Man-made types that breed true.
- V. Human evolution. The fossil record critically examined. Other evidences.
- VI. Summary of fundamental principles underlying the process of evolution. The four main theories. The promise of the future.

Tickets to the course may be secured from the comptroller, University of Chattanooga. There will be no single admission tickets. Tickets, \$5.00.

These cards were placed at entrances of club houses, the Y. M. C. A., etc. They were also sent to different club presidents, social and religious, for distribution among the members.

(3) Oral announcements at chapel exercises at the University of Chattanooga, at some club meetings and from church pulpits.

(4) Personal letters to nearly a hundred of the clergy of the city and vicinity. I wished to call the attention of the ministers to my course, explaining to them its purpose and giving complete data, since they more than any other group should be in a position to be helpful to any individuals who are sincerely interested to know the status of evolution theories at the present time. I asked them to give my lectures such publicity as they might find convenient.

Some publicity was secured in selling tickets by students of the University of Chattanooga, who were kind enough to volunteer their services.

It is not possible to state just how in general the announcement of the lectures was received by the public. I had one interesting but tragic experience in trying to distribute my information cards at a well attended men's club meeting in one of the most influential churches of the city. Only two years before this very club had invited a judge to discuss the subject of evolution. Though his speech had not been informative but merely made up of witticism about the scientists, the schools, yokels, monkeys, etc., which brought many a laugh, I expected that this group would be interested at least in an announcement in the interest of an evolutionist. While the president of the club was having one of my information cards placed at each plate on the long table some one objected because, he said, this was a "religious club." They were not distributed. A prominent member of the club then kindly offered to call attention to the cards which, he thought might more appropriately be placed at the exit, so that any one who was interested might take them on leaving. During the meeting he arose and spoke hesitantly, as though fearing that the announcement might not be well received. He called the attention of the members of the club to the cards at the exit "which announce a course of lectures by Dr. Green, at the University of Chattanooga. The subject is—" (the speaker hesitated a moment and spoke in a low voice) "Evolution." For several seconds there was a deathly silence. "I've never heard silence before," said one of my colleagues at the close of the meeting. No statement could better describe the situation.

This incident must not be interpreted to mean that most of the members of this club or any such men's club of Chattanooga are not in sympathy with the conclusions of modern science as to man's origin, but rather that the great majority of men here, as everywhere, are kindly tolerant and generously pay a somewhat extreme deference to the few who find these conclusions incompatible with their cherished personal convictions.

Several ministers in response to my personal letter announced the lectures from the pulpit, upon which occasion one discovered that he must have made a serious faux-pas. Some members of his congregation were much disappointed in him, and I was informed that prayers were offered that his eyes might be opened.

My letters to the ministers brought no written reply. Several pastors, however, expressed to me their satisfaction and one, after discussing for some minutes the deplorable prejudice that makes even good people afraid to face facts, concluded with the remark that he would be happy to co-operate in any attempt to spread a knowledge of the results of scientific investigation, but that his hands were tied.

My students were not successful in selling tickets. One reported that a physician had gotten indignant over the assumption that he would ever attend a lecture on evolution. He did not believe in evolution, nor would he ever let any member of his family listen to such theories. He stated that he would refuse to pay the tuition of his son who is now a "premedic," should he take any courses on evolution in the medical school.

I presented the course in six lectures as advertised and charged a fee of five dollars for the entire course. I felt I had to ask an admission fee since I undertook the adventure upon my own resources, and my expenses ran rather high. The advertisements (cards and paid advertisements in the newspapers), slides, books for research work in reference to the lectures, etc., amounted to approximately seventy-five dollars.

The tickets were issued to anybody interested. They were sold by students, and at the Comptroller's office at the University. I did not issue single tickets, since I found it necessary to present a clear view of the whole subject to give lectures in a certain sequence. This made necessary the attendance on all or nearly of them by those interested.

The number attending was not up to expectation. There were sixteen persons present, with a wide range of education. There were those without high school training, college students, educated people with Master's and Doctor's degrees. One minister, the pastor of a church noted for its liberality, was present.

The lectures were given as outlined on the information cards. The four main theories of evolution (natural selection, Weismannism, Mutation theory, Lamarck's theory of inheritance of acquired characters) were presented. Every lecture was abundantly illustrated with slides. Simple language was employed, technical terms being avoided so far as possible. Questions always were answered but discussions of the controversial type were avoided. The auditors showed great interest and usually stayed overtime.

On the basis of the experience gained I would make a number of changes in the manner of giving the course. Several who were interested believe that a more propitious time would be in the fall. I would begin early in October and give a shorter course at a reduced price for the series.

I would confine the discussion to the evidences and significance of evolution as applied to the human race. That is what practically every one who discussed the matter with me was interested in primarily. People generally have no patience to wade through the

general subject. Also I found it difficult to present effectively to the layman the correlation between evolution in the lower forms and the human.

Due to the fact that people rather resent being "informed" or "taught," I would advertise my lectures under a different title. I would prefer "Evolution of the Human Race as Scientists Understand It," to my former "Information as to the Present Status of the Theory of Evolution in General." People would much rather listen to opinions than to established facts. This statement is obviously illustrated by the recent Riley-McCabe debate in New York.

Deriving from my experiences in general my attitude towards the course is even more positive than at first. It is true that the number of auditors was far below expectation, but the class was congenial, the interest of the students being mutually stimulating to themselves, as well as to the lecturer. They all seemed to appreciate the little enlightenment on the subject which was given them.

Aside from the personal enjoyment in the presentation of these lectures a new type of contact with the general public was afforded, and thus a new avenue of service was opened up. Even though the attendance was small I feel that there was a genuine interest on the part of an influential few in the subject of evolution, and that it is abundantly worth any teacher's while to meet the need if possible. In closing I wish to express the hope that my experience will be of interest to the readers of our journal.