Book Notice

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Those who know Simpson's The Meaning of Evolution will be pleased to know that he has turned his considerable literary talent to an account of the science of paleontology at a level between journalistic and professional. He has attempted to provide "... a nontechnical discussion of the whole scope and significance of paleontology as a science, concerned with the principles and interpretation of the history of life and not only with the identification of objects called fossils." That purpose has been fulfilled admirably. Chapters 1-5, including kinds of fossils and the evolution of man's understanding of them, their use to the geologist, their significance as living things, and paleoecology, are excellent as they stand. Chapter 6, on "Fossils and Geography" may have too much in a small package for the nonprofessional. The discussion of faunal regions would be greatly aided by a map. Simpson retains the typical North American attitude toward continental drift, and argues so persuasively against it that the uninitiated may think they have heard the final truth on that subject. Chapters 7-10, on the diversity of life, changes through time, modes of evolution, and theories of evolution, are generally good, although the discussion of modes of evolution seems a bit weighty in view of the purpose of the book. The thrust at neo-Lamarckism (p. 144) would have been clearer and more telling if he had said, "The only significant support for (it) now... is in the U.S.S.R., where (if the political bosses so decree, only error may be expressed)." Chapter 11, expressing a raison d'être for paleontology, is masterful in every respect. It might well be read to every class in historical geology or paleontology before beginning the study of fossils. The book is made more useful to the lay reader by the inclusion of an appendix that gives a synopsis of the kingdoms of living things.

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