

## The Two Lectures

“And so,” said the lecturer, “I end where I began. Evolution, development, the slow struggle upwards and onwards from crude and inchoate beginnings towards ever-increasing perfection and elaboration - that appears to be the very formula of the whole universe. We see it exemplified in everything we study. The oak comes from the acorn. The giant express engine of today comes from the Rocket. The highest achievements of contemporary art are in a continuous line of descent from the rude scratchings with which prehistoric man adorned the wall of his cave. What are the ethics and philosophy of civilized man but a miraculous elaboration of the most primitive instincts of savage taboos? Each one of us has grown through slow pre-natal stages in which we were at first more like fish than mammals, from a particle of matter too small to be seen. Man himself springs from beasts; the organic from the inorganic. Development is the key word. The march of all things is from lower to higher.”

None of this, of course, was new to me or to anyone else in the audience. But it was put very well...and the whole voice and figure of the lecturer were impressive. At least they must have impressed me, for otherwise I cannot account for the curious dream I had that night. I dreamed that I was still at the lecture, and the voice from the platform was still going on. But it was saying all the wrong things. At least it may have been saying the right things up to the very moment at which I began attending; but it certainly began going wrong after that. What I remembered on waking went like this: “...appears to be the very formula of the whole universe. We see it exemplified in everything we study. The acorn comes from a full-grown oak. The first crude engine, the Rocket, comes not from a still cruder engine, but from something much more perfect than itself and much more complex, the mind of a man, and a man of genius. The first prehistoric drawings come, not from earlier scratchings, but from the hand and brain of human beings whose hand and brain cannot be shown to have been in any way inferior to our own; and indeed it is obvious that the man who first conceived the idea of making a picture must have been a greater genius than any of the artists who have succeeded him. The embryo with which the life of each of us began did not originate from something even more embryonic; it originated from two fully-developed human beings, our parents. Descent, downward movement, is the key word. The march of all things is from higher to lower. The rude and imperfect thing always springs from something perfect and developed.”

...It appeared to me that the Dream Lecturer had a good deal to be said for him. It is true that we do see all around us things growing up to perfection from small and rude beginnings; but then it is equally true that the small and rude beginnings themselves always come from some full-grown and developed thing. All adults were once babies, true; but then all babies were begotten and borne by adults. Corn does come from seed: but then seed comes from corn. I could even give the Dream Lecturer an example he had missed. All civilizations grow from small beginnings; but when you look into it you always find that those small beginnings themselves have been dropped (as an oak drops an acorn) by some other and mature civilization. . . The starting point of Greek culture is the remains of older Minoan cultures, supplemented by oddments from civilized Egypt and Phoenicia.

For the first time in my life I began to look at the question with both eyes open. In the world I

know, the perfect produces the imperfect, which again becomes perfect - egg leads to bird and bird to egg - in endless succession. If there ever was a life which sprang of its own accord out of a purely inorganic universe, or a civilization which raised itself by its own shoulder-straps out of pure savagery, then this event was totally unlike the beginnings of every subsequent civilization. The thing may have happened; but all its plausibility is gone. On any view, the first beginning must have been outside the ordinary processes of nature. An egg which came from no bird is no more natural than a bird which had existed from all eternity. And since the egg bird-egg sequence leads us to no plausible beginning, is it not reasonable to look for the real origin somewhere outside the sequence altogether? You have to go outside the sequence of engines, into the world of men, to find the real originator of the Rocket. Is it not equally reasonable to look outside Nature for the real Originator of the natural order?

(Lewis, "Two Lectures," The Coventry Evening Telegraph, February 21, 1945).