

of restoration would recover and right the stinned fish laid on its side; the law of reproduction would give limbs to the offspring of the mutilated saurian. We have evidence, in the extremeness of the degradation in these cases, that it cannot be a degradation hereditarily derived from accident. Nature is, we find, active, not in perpetuating the accidental wooden legs and green patches of ancestors in their descendants, but in restoring to the offspring the true limbs and eyes which the parents have lost. It is, however, not with a theory of hereditary degradation, but a hypothesis of gradual development, that I have at present to deal; and what I have to establish as proper to the present stage of my argument is, that this principle of degradation really exists, and that the history of its progress in creation bears directly against the assumption that the earlier vertebrata were of a lower type than the vertebrata of the same ichthyic class which exist now.*

* It will scarce be urged against the degradation theory, that those races which, tried by the tests of defect or misplacement of parts, we deem degraded, are not less fitted for carrying on what in their own little spheres is the proper business of life, than the non-degraded orders and families. The objection is, however, a possible one, and one which a single remark may serve to obviate. It is certainly true that the degraded families *are* thoroughly fitted for the performance of all the work given them to do. They greatly increase when placed in favorable circumstances, and, when vigorous and thriving, enjoy existence. But then the same may be said of all animals, without reference to their place in the scale;—the mollusc is as thoroughly adapted to its circumstances, and as fitted to accomplish the end proper to its being, as the mammiferous quadruped, and the mammiferous quadruped as man himself; but the fact of perfect adaptation in no degree invalidates the other not less certain fact of difference of rank, nor proves that the mollusc is equal to the quadruped, or the quadruped to man. And,