

## ***Evolution* by Langdon Smith (1895)**

When you were a tadpole and I was a fish  
In the Paleozoic time,  
And side by side on the ebbing tide  
We sprawled through the ooze and slime,  
Or skittered with many a caudal flip  
Through the depths of the Cambrian fen,  
My heart was rife with the joy of life,  
For I loved you even then.

Mindless we lived and mindless we loved  
And mindless at last we died;  
And deep in the rift of the Caradoc drift  
We slumbered side by side.  
The world turned on in the lathe of time,  
The hot lands heaved amain,  
Till we caught our breath from the womb of death  
And crept into light again.

We were amphibians, scaled and tailed,  
And drab as a dead man's hand;  
We coiled at ease 'neath the dripping trees  
Or trailed through the mud and sand.  
Croaking and blind, with our three-clawed feet  
Writing a language dumb,  
With never a spark in the empty dark  
To hint at a life to come.

Yet happy we lived and happy we loved,  
And happy we died once more;  
Our forms were rolled in the clinging mold  
Of a Neocomian shore.  
The eons came and the eons fled  
And the sleep that wrapped us fast  
Was riven away in a newer day  
And the night of death was past.

Then light and swift through the jungle trees  
We swung in our airy flights,  
Or breathed in the balms of the fronded palms  
In the hush of the moonless nights;  
And, oh! what beautiful years were there  
When our hearts clung each to each;  
When life was filled and our senses thrilled  
In the first faint dawn of speech.

Thus life by life and love by love  
We passed through the cycles strange,  
And breath by breath and death by death  
We followed the chain of change.  
Till there came a time in the law of life  
When over the nursing side  
The shadows broke and soul awoke  
In a strange, dim dream of God.

I was thewed like an Auruch bull  
And tusked like the great cave bear;  
And you, my sweet, from head to feet  
Were gowned in your glorious hair.  
Deep in the gloom of a fireless cave,  
When the night fell o'er the plain  
And the moon hung red o'er the river bed  
We mumbled the bones of the slain.

I flaked a flint to a cutting edge  
And shaped it with brutish craft;  
I broke a shank from the woodland lank  
And fitted it, head and haft;  
Then I hid me close to the reedy tarn,  
Where the mammoth came to drink;  
Through the brawn and bone I drove the stone  
And slew him upon the brink.

Loud I howled through the moonlit wastes,  
Loud answered our kith and kin;  
From west and east to the crimson feast  
The clan came tramping in.  
O'er joint and gristle and padded hoof  
We fought and clawed and tore,  
And check by jowl with many a growl  
We talked the marvel o'er.

I carved that fight on a reindeer bone  
With rude and hairy hand;  
I pictured his fall on the cavern wall  
That men might understand.  
For we lived by blood and the right of might  
Ere human laws were drawn,  
And the age of sin did not begin  
Till our brutal tush were gone.

And that was a million years ago  
In a time that no man knows;  
Yet here tonight in the mellow light  
We sit at Delmonico's.  
Your eyes are deep as the Devon springs,  
Your hair is dark as jet,  
Your years are few, your life is new,  
Your soul untried, and yet -

Our trail is on the Kimmeridge clay  
And the scarp of the Purbeck flags;  
We have left our bones in the Bagshot stones  
And deep in the Coralline crags;  
Our love is old, our lives are old,  
And death shall come amain;  
Should it come today, what man may say  
We shall not live again?

God wrought our souls from the Tremadoc beds  
And furnished them wings to fly;  
We sowed our spawn in the world's dim dawn,  
And I know that it shall not die,  
Though cities have sprung above the graves  
Where the crook-bone men make war  
And the oxwain creaks o'er the buried caves  
Where the mummied mammoths are.

Then as we linger at luncheon here  
O'er many a dainty dish,  
Let us drink anew to the time when you  
Were a tadpole and I was a fish.