

The Earth

The history of life on the Earth has been a history of interaction between living things and their surroundings. To a large extent, the environment has moulded the physical form and the habits of the Earth's vegetation and its animal life. Considering the whole span of earthly time, the opposite effect, in which life has actually modified its surrounding, has been relatively slight. Only within the moment of time represented by the present century has one species, man, acquired significant power to alter the nature of this world. During the past quarter of a century this power has not only increased to a disturbing magnitude but it has also changed in character. The most alarming of all man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials. The pollution is for the most part irrecoverable, the chain of evil it initiates is not only in the world that must support life, but also in living tissues, and it is for the most part irreversible. In this new universal contamination of the environment, chemicals are the sinister and little recognised partners of radiation, changing the very nature of the world and the very nature of its life. Strontium 90, released through nuclear explosions into the air, comes to earth in the form of rain or drifts down as fallout, lodges in the soil, enters into the grass or corn, or wheat grown there, and within time takes up its abode in the bones of a human being, there to remain until his death. Similarly, chemicals sprayed on croplands or forests or gardens lie long in soil, entering into living organisms, passing from one to another in a chain of poisoning and death. Or they pass mysteriously by underground streams until they emerge, and through the alchemy of air and sunlight, combine into new forms that kill vegetation, sickens cattle, and work unknown harm on those who drink from once pure wells.

As Albert Schweitzer has said, 'Man can hardly even recognize the devils of his own creations'. It took two hundred million years to produce the life that now inhabits the Earth, eons of time in which the developing, evolving and diversifying reached a state of adjustment and balance with its surroundings. The environment, rigorously shaping and directing the life it supported, contained elements that were hostile as well as supporting. Certain rocks give out dangerous radiation, even within the light of the sun from which all life draws its energy, there were short wave radiations with power to injure. Given time, time not in years but millennia, life adjusted, and a balance was reached. For time is the essential ingredient, but in the modern world there is no time. The rapidity of change and the speed with which new situations are created follow the impetuous and the heedless pace of man rather than the deliberate pace of nature. Radiation is no longer merely the background radiation of rocks, the bombardment of cosmic rays, the ultra-violet of the sun that has existed before there was any life on Earth; radiation is now the unnatural creation of man's tampering with the atom. The chemicals to which life is asked to make its adjustment are no longer merely the calcium and silica and copper and all the rest of the minerals washed out of the rocks and carried in rivers to the sea, they are the synthetic creations of man's inventive mind, brewed in his laboratories, and having no counterparts in nature.

Q. Write and learn the spellings of the underlined words from the text.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

Q. Write the meanings of the following words in the spaces provided.

a. alchemy _____

b. hostile _____

c. impetuous _____

d. sinister _____

e. lethal _____

f. initiates _____

Q. Answer the following questions based on the text 'The Earth'.

a. Clearly explain the main idea of the first paragraph in about 30 words.

b. Explain what the writer means by the 'chain of evil' in the second paragraph.

c. 'Man can hardly even recognise the devils of his own creations'. In the light of what you read in the second paragraph explain why it is so.

d. 'Time is an essential ingredient, but in the modern world there is no time'. Explain briefly what the writer means.

e. Explain why the writer in the last paragraph is critical of man's interference with nature?
