

Tempestuous times

A review of:
Green Eye of the Storm
 By John Rendle-Short
 The Banner of Truth Trust
 Edinburgh, Scotland,
 1998.

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This is a book unlike most of the others which concern the creation/evolution issue. Although it quotes arguments from many books and articles by other scientists, it has not been written with the intent of dealing with the so-called 'cold hard facts of science.' Instead, it provides us with an intriguing insight into the lives of four very prominent and influential scientists/intellectuals, whose lives have spanned almost the last two centuries. John Rendle-Short (JRS) chose to show us the profound influence of Darwinian (and post Darwinian, in some cases) concepts on their thinking, and their lives in general. These scientists are:

Philip Henry Gosse, FRS (1810-1888). Zoologist and marine biologist. Inventor of the institutional aquarium for long-term housing of marine animals. Compiler of the first descriptive catalogue of British marine invertebrates. Author of more than ten books.

George John Romanes, FRS, (1848-1894). A pioneer physiologist and friend and disciple of Charles Darwin. Author of more than twenty-five books and numerous articles.

Arthur Rendle Short, BSc, M.D., F.R.C.S., (1880-1953). Physiologist, geologist, surgeon. Author of many books on surgery, physiology and biblical apologetics.

John Rendle-Short, AM, M.D., F.R.C.P., (1919-). The Author and

now retired Emeritus Professor of Child Health, University of Queensland, Australia. Author of several books on Child Health, and also biblical apologetics, including *Reasonable Christianity*. Founding chairman of Creation Science Foundation (now Answers in Genesis) in Australia. Son of Arthur Rendle Short.¹

The author writes,

'All four were professing Christians.

All four were deeply influenced by Darwinism, and reacted to it in markedly different ways.'

and

'I have not attempted formal biographies, and make no apologies for the fact that I am more concerned to follow the flow of ideas than strict chronology. My objective has been to select episodes from the lives of each of the four to demonstrate how they responded to a persuasive scientific theory, which as the decades passed, revealed itself as a philosophy which sapped their Christian faith like a bug in the bud of an orchid' (pp. ix and x).

This is a very important statement in the context of the whole book. JRS has researched extensively and made very good use of older manuscripts and biographies to illustrate his points. With his informative style of presentation, one easily journeys back into the past to 'sense' the mood and sometimes controversy of the day. In this way, the conflict within his subjects becomes self-evident.

In the case of Gosse, JRS sets the scene of the pre-Darwin period of Erasmus Darwin, who was Charles Darwin's grandfather and an evolutionist of sorts, and the effect of Charles Lyell's uniformitarian ('slow and gradual') concepts in his book, *Principles of Geology?* an extremely influential book which accompanied



Charles Darwin on his voyage in the ship 'Beagle'.

All of this led up to the 'storm' itself, Darwin's *Origin of Species*.³ Gosse, a deeply Christian man who had been concerned about the increasing influence of Lyell's theories and its subsequent attacks on biblical creation, reacted very swiftly and perhaps hastily to counter the rising swell by writing *Omphalos*.⁴ A massive book of some 370 pages, its title means 'navel', referring to the old chestnut about Adam's navel.

Gosse's idea involves created nature displaying a 'built-in' history that did not happen in reality. Gosse says, '*all organic nature moves in a circle*' and '*Creation is a violent interruption into the circle of nature*' (p. 30). He also remarks that:

'no example can be selected from the vast vegetable [or animal] kingdom, which did not at the time of its creation present indubitable evidence of a previous history' (p. 33).

Gosse received almost universally adverse criticism of his work from 'both sides of the camp'. Some journalists even ridiculed him by questioning whether God had hidden the fossils in the rocks to tempt latter day geologists into infidelity.



Philip Henry Gosse (1810-1888)

In *Green Eye of the Storm* JRS quotes passages from Gosse's *Omphalos* extensively, and shows how Gosse became increasingly isolated due to the reaction to his book. JRS often points out that the early creationists did not have the benefit of modern discoveries to argue their cause.

He historically describes Darwinism as five eras of roughly fifty years each, as follows:

1. 1750-1800: *The era of Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802).*
2. 1800-1850: *Pre Darwinism [Gosse].*
3. 1850-1900: *Darwin triumphant: era of scientific and theological consolidation [Romanes].*
4. 1900-1950: *Era of universal acceptance: no substantial scientific voices raised against [Arthur Rendle Short].*
5. 1950-2000: *Era of rapidly increasing scientific challenge to evolution and its associated time scale [John Rendle-Short].*

George Romanes became a convert, staunch ally, supporter and friend of Darwin. He became such a devotee, that it was remarked that 'Romanes was virtually anointed Darwin's successor by the old man himself, and promoted evolution 'with

a zeal that made Huxley [Darwin's 'bulldog' — G.B.] look the model of Victorian reserve.⁵

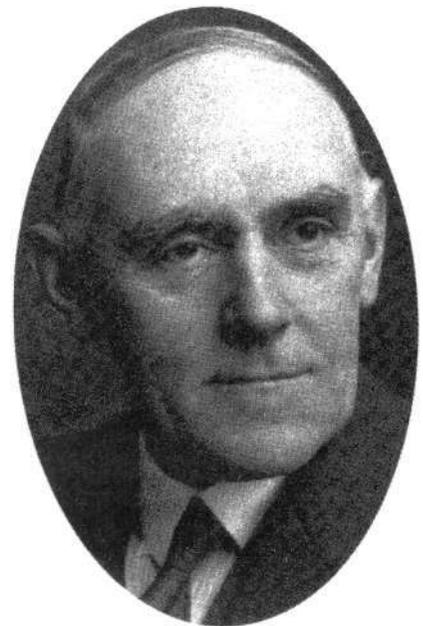
Through Darwin, Romanes became friendly with many of the notable scientists of the day, including Lyell, Thomas, Huxley and others.

It was fascinating to discover that early in his life, Romanes was determined to study for the Holy Orders, but his overwhelming acceptance of Darwin had caused his faith to slip away, leading him to investigate spiritism and psychic phenomena. Only two years before his own death, Romanes (who was a poet of some note) wrote a mind-boggling 25-page eulogy for his friend Charles Darwin, entitled the *Memorial Poem*.

JRS is able to demonstrate the spiritual decline that Romanes suffered through his acceptance of evolution. He also notes in his book how the same effect on society in general was prophesied by many writers and contemporaries of the day. It was instructive to note their views from the cultural standpoint of the time, which was 'overtly Christian'. What changes we have seen. For those critics who disagree with the view that society has descended into materialism as a result of evolution theory, viewing our world



George John Romanes (1848-1894)



Arthur Rendle Short (1880-1953)

today with such historical hindsight should leave them in no doubt.

Fortunately for George Romanes, during the last few years of his life, when ill health prevailed, he recovered his faith. As with many artists, his heart was on his sleeve and his poems revealed a spiritual void that materialism could not fill. Almost his last words to his wife were 'it is Christianity or nothing' (p. 87).

The author's father, Arthur Rendle Short (ARS), was by anyone's standards a brilliant man, and by any definition a 'practising Christian'. Although biographies have been written about ARS, John Rendle-Short reveals major, hitherto untapped sources of information about his father, such as diaries and an unpublished manuscript written in the latter part of ARS's life. Extensive use is also made of his father's sermon notes spanning his entire adult life. These have remained, virtually untouched, in the possession of JRS for many years. It is easy to become engrossed in the author's personal voyage of discovery when perusing his father's handwritten notes.

As JRS states:

It was then I discovered, for the first time, something of the struggle

for truth which had occupied my father from his teens until the year of his death' (p. xi).

The understandable emotion does not cloud the author's objectivity. He clearly shows that during this period of the twentieth century, evolution was triumphant and universally accepted. Evangelicals like his father were swept up by the tide, and the church *en masse* proceeded to compromise and reinterpret Scripture, believing it had 'no choice'.

ARS was firm in his belief in the Holy Scriptures and particularly in the uniqueness of man's spiritual being. Despite Lyell and Darwin, ARS determined that reconciliation between biology, geology and Genesis had to be possible, although this still provided conflict with his Christian beliefs. This conflict was to grow as time went on. The greatest impasse for ARS was 'the Fall'. If there had been a descent into the current corrupt world as the Bible describes, then a previously good (and vastly different) world was required.

ARS's sermon notes hint tantalisingly that, as he approached the end of his life, he gradually abandoned his theistic evolutionary compromise in favour of the authority of the Bible (especially Genesis) in earth history.

The 'Fall' is still a major hurdle for theistic evolutionists today, as in fact it was in the author's life, too. How could a God who was good create a world of suffering? JRS's own realisation on this point should be bookmarked by all who are tempted to compromise. If Christians believe that God is good, then it is incompatible with his nature to superintend millions of years of senseless death and suffering.

The catalyst for JRS's conversion

to 'full-blown' creationist was a chance meeting with Professor A.E. Wilder Smith and the subsequent reading of his book, *Man's Origin, Man's Destiny*.⁶ Till then, JRS had never read or even heard of a significant scientist believing in a biblical six-day creation.

Towards the end of the book, JRS presents some arguments for the creationist case from a scientific and



John Rendle-Short (1919-)

an apologetics viewpoint.

I found the author's voyage of discovery significant and refreshing. It serves as an example of the genuine search for truth, regardless of what the outcome may be. On many occasions, this would have taken him out of his 'comfort zone'. Unfortunately today, many will not venture out of a world of preconceptions and bias, perhaps for the fear of truth itself. *'Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'* (John 8:32 [NIV]).

What is abundantly clear after

reading this book is the dilemma that many Christians, particularly in the scientific realm, find themselves facing, *'crushed between their two major loves: the seemingly irresistible force of science, and the immovable inerrancy of scripture'* (p. 48). Many have tried to salve their conscience by concocting some 'fuzzy formula', as in the case of Gosse, which is ultimately unworkable. Others have turned to theistic evolution, as in the case of ARS, a leading proponent of that view. Even he could not comfortably sustain that belief and his trust in God's Word simultaneously.

For those of us in the modern 'enlightened era', this book is a very informative insight into the rampant acceptance and steam-rolling effects of Darwinism.

I believe the author has succeeded admirably in showing that Darwinism and its numerous sub-branches constitute a comprehensive philosophical belief system, and that this system is unnecessary and unsatisfactory for Christians in years past, and equally so today.

* *Green Eye of the Storm* is available through *Answers in Genesis* ministries.

References

1. Note that the senior Rendle Short did not hyphenate his name like his son.
2. Lyell, C, *Principles of Geology*, John Murray, London, 10th edition, 1867. First published in 1830.
3. Darwin, C, *On the Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*, 1st ed., John Murray, 1859.
4. Gosse, P.H., *Omphalos*, John Van Voors, London, 1857.
5. Richards, R.J., *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behaviour*, University of Chicago Press, p. 332, 1987.
6. Wilder Smith, A.E., *Man's Origin, Man's Destiny*, Shaw, Wheaton, Illinois, 1968.