

HOW THINGS BEGAN

EVOLUTION AND PHILOSOPHY, by G. H. Duggan, S.M.; A. H. and A. W. Reed. Price, 12/6.

(Reviewed by Arthur N. Prior)

DEDICATED to St. Thomas Aquinas, and with a preface by Dr. R. A. Falla, this work aims at revealing "what modern science—as distinct from the journalists and the writers of radio fiction—has to tell us about 'how things began.'" Modern science, according to Father Duggan, gives no reason to believe that the main different types of living creatures have a common ancestry, though he admits that there is strong evidence for the evolution of one species into another *within* these broad types. There is evidence, for example, that horses and zebras have a common ancestry; but none that horses and whales have, let alone horses and influenza germs. Biologists in general, we are told, have only refused to see that this is the way the evidence points because they cannot stomach the only rational alternative to the common descent theory—the bringing into being of the main types of living creatures by special divine action. Hence Father Duggan's statement of the biological and geological grounds for his thesis is introduced by some demonstrations of the existence of God.

Philosophers who do not believe in God, says the author, have always found it impossible to talk sensibly about time and change—either they have held that change does not occur, or they have held that change is the only thing there is. The cause of theism is ill served, I would suggest, by the making of such rash accusations against its opponents. Many of the latter have discussed time and change much more rationally than the ones Father Duggan has chosen to consider; and even against these last he spoils his case by over-arguing it. For instance, although the idea of an uncaused change is a bizarre one to most of us, it is an abuse of logical terminology to call it, as Father Duggan does, "self-contradictory." His indiscriminate employment of this charge is curiously reminiscent of the free way in which "Logical Positivists" sling about the charge of "meaninglessness." This habit of crying "Wolf!" when there is no wolf there, may only make his readers take no notice of him when there really is one, as in the case of Hegel (against whom he quotes Aristotle to very good effect).

In his central argument, the biogeological one, Father Duggan lays particular stress on the precise character of the gaps in the fossil record. The fossils that have never yet been discovered, he claims, are precisely those transitional forms, in between the main biological types, which the theory of a universal common descent would require. He means by this not merely that there are numerous differences between the creatures on one side of such a gap and those on the other (this would prove nothing, since we would not speak of a "gap" at all if this were not so), but that the differences are "crucial" ones, placing organisms not merely in different minor subdivisions but in different major groups. This assumes that there

are some characteristics which are self-evidently suitable for marking off major groups, while others are self-evidently the marks of mere sub-divisions; and at one point (pp. 189-190) Father Duggan himself makes it clear that this is what his general position involves. But the principles of biological classification are not as cut-and-dried as that. Even when it comes to placing organisms in their "major" groups, biologists are sometimes undecided as to where a given one should go, not because they do not know what its characteristics are (that ground of indecision, Father Duggan rightly insists, would in no way tell against his theory) but because they cannot decide which of its characteristics is most suitable for use as a dividing-line. Indecision at just this point is surely a clear sign of being in the presence of just the sort of transitional forms which Father Duggan says cannot be found.

DIGNITY WITHOUT DULLNESS

GRAND HILLS FOR SHEEP, by Georgina McDonald; Whitcombe & Tombs. Price 11/6.

A NOVEL which is already out of print induces a certain awkwardness in a reviewer. This Otago Centennial prize novel has other titles to respect besides its evident popularity. It is careful and accurate in its historical detail. The writer manages a full quiver of characters with judgment and skill. Inevitably in a family scene which tends to be crowded some people are little more than names. The covering of a large span of time also makes it difficult to see enough of all the people. The family itself, the Gaelic-speaking McCallums who emigrate to early Otago, is the theme rather than the individuals. Shona, the heroine, is, like most of the people in the book, pleasant and dutiful. Georgina McDonald seems better at portraying the minor incidents of family life (which she does very well) than at handling major emotional crises; her attention is wholesomely absorbed by the work of household and farm in which private emotion tends to be overlaid and discounted.

It is not intended as denigration to say that this is the sort of novel Americans describe with pleasure as "folksy."

(continued on next page)



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