

HOW THINGS BEGAN

Sir,—Mr. Prior in his latest letter speaks of "the strength of the theory of evolution." Actually, there are dozens of theories of evolution, but since he is so concerned to establish the existence of transitional forms between major groups or organisms, it seems fair to infer that he is defending some theory of gradual evolution, and I shall accordingly understand the term in that sense.

Such a theory logically requires a vast number of transitional forms, as Darwin admitted. These forms are missing from the fossil record, and even if there were one or two among living types the theory would still be left high and dry. Mr. Prior will need a lot more than *Peripatus* to refute my generalisation that "biologists accept the existence of such groups as fishes, arthropods, birds, without question, and they have no doubt about which of these groups a given organism is to be assigned to."

Peripatus is, of course, the best example Mr. Prior can cite. But *Peripatus* is not a transitional form, for there is no real doubt about where *Peripatus* belongs. Mr. Prior himself says as much. "No biologist," he writes, "now classifies *Peripatus* as an *Annelid*." On the other hand, to quote Mr. Prior again, "in most modern text-books it is placed in the phylum *Arthropoda*." Why "most?" Can he quote one modern text-book that does not place *Peripatus* in that phylum? Adam Sedgwick settled the classification of *Peripatus* about sixty years ago. "There can be no doubt," he wrote, "that *Peripatus* is an *Arthropod*." Parker and Halswell, on whom Mr. Prior relies, contradict themselves, for on the one hand they declare that "Arthropods are characterised by the universal absence of cilia," and on the other they admit that *Peripatus* has cilia and classify it among the *Arthropoda*. According to Moseley, "the legs in advanced embryos show a distinct division into five joints by transverse constrictions, but in the adults this jointing is much obscured."

Mr. Prior is guilty of sophistry in suggesting that "A.A.N." demanded that the theory of evolution be proved with the same cogency as a theorem in mathematics. "A.A.N." spoke of logic, but I find no reference in his letter to mathematics. If Mr. Prior can indicate any such reference, I shall be glad to have it. "A.A.N." made the perfectly valid point that there must be something scientifically wrong with a theory which has to fix its attention on a few doubtful cases (and not so doubtful, either!) and ignores the fact that the organic world can be classified into a system of well-defined types.

Scientific theories may not be strictly demonstrable, and all are liable to correction, as Mr. Prior says. Sometimes, too, they are scrapped. If the theory of gradual evolution were no more than a scientific theory, it would have been scrapped long ago, for it is as plainly contrary to fact as the system of Ptolemy. But it is an integral part of a philosophical creed, and if the theory is scrapped, that creed will have to be re-examined. And few of us are willing to face that task.

G. H. DUGGAN, S.M.
(Greenmeadows).

Sir,—To my mind, Father Duggan is mistaken when he uses "A is A" as a type of proposition. There is no proposition of the type "A is A"; and to suggest that it's contradictory is nonsense omits the fact of its own nonsense. May I continue? If various creatures are

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polyphlogenetically derived, as Father Duggan seeks to prove, it may be right that a Supramundane Cause is needed to make a hen lay an egg. I don't know. Together with Bertrand Russell, "I do not believe that philosophy can either prove or disprove the truth of religious dogmas." Like him, and Albert Einstein, I am content, in my mind, with mystery. I am satisfied if my own observations and explanations have the status of appearances, and make no claim for their infallibility.

At the same time, I am not willing to deny the use of intelligence, or admit that I "might as well be a cow or a cabbage," when I give to my "is" no more meaning than "seems to be." I admit the regress; I will admit, if necessary, the truth of contradictory propositions. After all, we learn mostly by induction, and this, I agree with Russell, is not a process of logic. If I find that a thing is a horse, and is not a horse, to use Father Duggan's example, I do not say that thought is therefore impossible. I do, however, realise, as Chesterton did, the insanity of a merely rational attitude. I do not look to logic for my metaphysics; to confuse logical validity with truth would, to my mind, be as silly as to confuse hygiene with health. My God is unknown, mysterious and undefined, and I cannot, therefore, quarrel, on logical grounds, with Father Duggan, when he writes: "Although the primary object of the Divine knowledge is God Himself, in knowing Himself God knows the creative decree that confers existence on particular things, and knows particular things in this decree."

I shall not even bring against him the charge of advocacy which Samuel Butler brought against clergymen. At the same time, since St. Thomas Aquinas is not for me *princeps philosophum et magister meus*, I am not satisfied to regard God as Thought thinking about Itself. Cyril Joad, who rather reluctantly, I think, believes in this Deity, calls It impersonal. I am not content with the epistemological approach to God, though I think that it is a stage which must be passed through. The pity of it is that this stage should be permitted to establish one's belief, either in theism or in atheism. I should hate to entrust to my own petty brain the whole decision of my faith. I agree with Willi Hollitscher that our beliefs and attitudes are more socio-psychological than logical, and with Sigmund Freud that our unconscious mind conditions our conscious thinking. I think, with McDougall, that there is a human instinct of awe and reverence.

In conclusion, Sir, I shall anticipate a charge of trivialisation, and state that I regard philosophy and religion as worth while in themselves, for the joy of thinking, and for the relief of worship. I would also thank Father Duggan for the stimulus which he has given to thought in New Zealand.

ROBERT MOUAT (Christchurch).

Sir,—Replying to A. Stenberg's criticism directed at me, there is small room for reasonable discussion between perfervid fundamentalists and those who, appreciating possible moral elements in the Biblical story, are unable to accept it as true in fact. From the physical, mental and spiritual angles man is a very unsatisfactory job of special creative work. Seen as an evolved and still evolving creature, man commands our wonder, admiration, and some hope.

If he fell and must be redeemed, the plan of redemption seems to have failed. It failed in Palestine when those whom Christ was allegedly sent to redeem caused Him to be crucified. It failed when His death was declared to have destroyed the power of evil, for the world today contains more evil than it ever did before.

All religions bear witness to man's unquenchable urge to reach out into infinity in the hope of grasping enduring reality. The man-made Christian religion is linked with very ancient Persian, Egyptian, Jewish, Greek and Roman pagan beliefs, some residues of which are embedded in it blended with the spiritual element in the reputed gospel of Christ. It has been a tremendous power for good. It has also been the mainspring of ruthless slaughter, black and devilish cruelties done by religious fanatics upon one another. Vested priesthoods thrive upon the fears and hopes of the primitive being who lurks in the subconscious of even the most cultivated of us. Vested priest-hoods have been, and still are, obstacles to the full development of freedom for the human mind and spirit.

Opinions may differ as to whether man is today any nearer to solving the mystery of life than he was when he first began to think and set up his varied and astonishing deities. I think he is nearer the possibility of making for himself a life far nobler than anything he has hitherto had; provided he is prepared to throw off the shackles of dogma and superstition and make the best of what he knows about himself and the world he lives in.

J. MALTON MURRAY (Oamaru).

ADVICE FROM LISTENERS

Sir,—The New Year message to listeners by the new Minister of Broadcasting, the Hon. F. W. Doidge, makes interesting reading. There are many in this country, of whom I am one, who in the past would have liked to make suggestions and recommendations, but felt that they were not welcomed. Now the new policy enunciated by Mr. Doidge is to encourage the listener to make constructive suggestions. It is here that, I think, we should pause to think what this may mean to the Director and his staff. If everyone is invited, and such invitations are accepted, what a flood of correspondence there will be! In addition, will it be physically possible for each suggestion to receive the consideration it may be entitled to?

The Minister has suggested that there be formed "Listening Parties." That is an excellent idea, but it is only the first stage; the second is the formation of Listeners' Associations, and when these are formed all over the Dominion a Federation of Listeners' Associations should be the logical sequence. All ideas, suggestions and recommendations would then be discussed by each association and, when accepted, passed on to the Federation, with whom the Director and staff of the Broadcasting Service would deal. Some such organisation is an absolute necessity, in reply to the Minister's request, and we are morally bound to do all that lies in our power to make constructive recommendations for the benefit of the Service as a whole.

It is true in broadcasting, as in every other walk of life, that the "onlooker

sees most of the game," and if that is true we should be willing to offer advice in the best possible manner to those whose duty it will be to consider it.

H. GLADSTONE HILL
(Plimmerton).

"BONNIE PRINCE CHARLIE"

Sir,—I should like to thank "P.J.W." for writing his review of *Bonnie Prince Charlie* without once misusing the term "Sassenach." For the benefit of your other contributors who attempt to imbue any reference to Scotland with a local flavour, a Sassenach is a non-Gaelic speaker. The Gaelic-speaking Highlander never differentiated between Lowland Scot and Englishman—they are both Sassenachs. Robert Burns was a Sassenach, as are the vast majority of his countrymen; and he would, I imagine, have been extremely indignant at any attempt to identify him with the savages of the North. However, since his day tailors' handbooks of tartans and the dyers' art have changed things, and the general impression abroad seems to be that everyone from Gretna Green to John o' Groats was garbed to shame Jacob.

With reference to the film *Bonnie Prince Charlie*, I consider it good entertainment, once the shock of the amazing tartans and the Lowland speech of the "Highlanders" is over. The last point is not without irony, inasmuch as the "Forty-five" is generally accepted by historians as the last struggle of the feudal Celtic North against the encroaching industrial South. The South seems to have won indeed if there are not enough Gaelic speakers left to give atmosphere to a film.

The absence of Will Fyfe may have cost something in the way of comedy, but anyone less like a Highlander in speech and temperament I find it difficult to imagine.

MALCOLM McALPINE
(Wellington).

WORLD THEATRE

Sir,—During the presentation of a play there is usually an interval during which the enthralled playgoers may stretch their legs and talk among themselves. On resuming their seats, however, the lights are lowered and the magic of the theatre once more holds sway.

May I take this opportunity of pointing out to the NZBS that the successful presentation of a radio play requires a different technique and that the delightful charm of *She Stoops to Conquer* and the brilliant speaking of Dame Irene Vanbrugh and Miss Margaretta Scott should not be forced to compete with the sports results of New Zealand tournaments. If such interruption is considered unavoidable, surely it is not too much to ask of the Broadcasting Service that they should allow us an interval of quiet or of suitable music between the end of the sports results and the beginning of Oliver Goldsmith's Second Act?

This was to me a great occasion in New Zealand broadcasting. The players and playwright gave of their best; cannot the producers at 2YA assist rather than hinder their most excellent efforts?

M. MARSH (Wellington).