

EVOLUTION AND CHRISTIANITY

[While reprinting the following correspondence which has lately appeared in the Manitoba Free Press, we beg to remind our readers that Dr. Buller is one of the four new University professors chosen last summer by a committee of seven, of which Father Drummond was a member. Dr. Buller is from the University of Birmingham and is about thirty years of age.]

To the Editor of the Free Press.

Sir—I read with much interest a report of the Rev. Father Drummond's exposition of Roman Catholic dogma in last Tuesday's Free Press News Bulletin. He stated that "Men who pretended to great learning had given to the world the theory of evolution, and had supported it by experiments and facts concerning the lower order of animals. But it still remained absolutely impossible to prove that man had arisen from an animal. There were no scientific proofs in favor of the theory and strong proofs against it; and, besides, it was inconsistent with the Christian Faith. Whatever may be the limits of evolution established by science in the future there will always be overwhelming arguments against the theory of the progress of man."

Now, sir, having been a student of biology during the last ten years in various parts of Europe and having a considerable interest in the subject of evolution, I venture to affirm that the position taken up by Father Drummond is one that cannot be maintained by any sound arguments.

In the first place he speaks of those "who pretended to great learning." One must suppose that Father Drummond is here referring to Darwin and Huxley. Those who are acquainted with the work and have read the biographies of these men will know that, whereas they most certainly had the great learning, there was no pretence about it, and that record of more unassuming minds is not to be found in the long annals of the nineteenth century.

Father Drummond said that there are strong proofs that man has not risen from an animal. The hardihood of such a statement creates nothing less than blank astonishment in my mind. Where indeed, are there such proofs of this negation? If Father Drummond will bring them to the light of day and show them to be sound I should be much obliged to him.

I venture to dissent in the strongest way from Father Drummond's assertion that there are "overwhelming arguments against the theory of the progress of man." On the other hand if Father Drummond will turn to the pages of Darwin's "Descent of Man" and Huxley's "Man's Place in Nature," he will find abundant evidence that the exact contrary is the case. To recapitulate this evidence here would take up too much space in your valuable paper.

If one is to accept the theory of evolution at all, it seems quite illogical to stop short in its application at man. The arguments for man's evolution from some "quadrumanal animal of arboreal habits" is just as strong, nay stronger, than the arguments for the evolution of birds from reptiles, or of flowering plants from the lower Cryptogamia. The halfway men who hesitated to accept the theory of evolution for man himself, and were to be found in some numbers twenty years ago, are now, practically, non-existent, and I can only express my sorrow that Father Drummond still holds and teaches their opinions.

If the evolution of man from lower animals is "at variance with Christianity," so much the worse for Christianity. But I am not one of those who is inclined to think that the fullest acceptance and recognition of the theory of evolution will in any way endanger what is of most value in the greatest of all religions.

I have had the pleasure of an introduction to Father Drummond and hope that he will in no way consider this letter to be a personal attack or one directed in any special manner against the Catholic creed. In the interests of truth and as one of the liege men of Natural science I have but counted it my duty to utter a protest against statements, which, I feel convinced, are misleading and therefore inimical to the welfare of the community.

A. H. REGINALD BULLER.

The University of Manitoba, Department of Botany.
December 10.

To the Editor of the Free Press.

Sir—The letter which you published last Saturday from Dr. Buller, recently appointed professor of botany in the University of Manitoba, evidently suggested a reply. Far from considering that letter a personal attack, I am rather pleased at the opportunity it may afford for a fuller explanation of my argument on evolution and the supposedly

infinite future progress of the human race. The report which Dr. Buller quotes from your columns, though substantially correct so far as it goes, is very incomplete, since it does not represent more than a small fraction of what I said on this subject in my sermon of the 5th inst.

But before entering upon any argument, I wish to draw attention to the most striking sentence in Dr. Buller's letter. "If the evolution of man," my learned friend wrote, "is at variance with Christianity, so much the worse for Christianity." Without laying undue stress on a phrase thrown off under the nerve-racking influence of "blank astonishment" and "sorrow" at my hardihood by "one of the liege men of Natural" (big N, please) "science," I beg to inform Dr. Buller that the twentieth section of the University Act (consolidated statutes, cap. 63) contains these words: "It shall not be lawful for any member of the council

to do, or cause, or suffer to be done, anything that would render it necessary or advisable, with a view to academical success or distinction, that any person should pursue the study of any materialistic or sceptical system of logic, or mental or moral philosophy." Now, as those who either reject Christianity or apologize it in a metaphor generally drift into putting to Dr. Buller a question which will serve, so to speak, to clear the decks for action: My question is simply this: Does Dr. Buller hold the spirituality and immortality of the human soul? Upon his answer to this question will depend my line of argument.

As I have been obliged, through illness to put off this introductory reply for a week, perhaps Dr. Buller might do likewise, and answer my question next Saturday. This would give both of us busy men more time to do justice to a very important subject.

LEWIS DRUMMOND, S.J.

St. Boniface, Dec. 16.

To the Editor of the Free Press.

Sir—In answer to Father Drummond, let me begin by offering him my sympathy in his illness, which, he states, put off his reply to my letter for a week. In accordance with his request, I have delayed a few days before sending you this communication.

In my letter of Dec. 10, I asked Father Drummond to produce his "strong proofs" that man has not descended from a lower animal, and dissented emphatically from his assertion that there are "overwhelming arguments against the theory of the progress of man." I also pointed out how illogical is the position of those who admit evolution for all animals except man.

In replying, Father Drummond has avoided these points, and has raised a number of side issues, which have nothing whatever to do with the facts upon which the theory of evolution is based. Quotations from acts of parliament and an expression of opinion on the mysteries of man's inner life are quite irrelevant in this connection.

The main issue raised in your columns and justly recognized by your correspondent, "H", in his letter on "The Ancestry of Man," is clear enough. Is man descended from a lower animal, or is he not? Biologists have long answered the question in the affirmative, and do not even think the matter open for further discussion among themselves. The conclusion of the biologists, one of the most important of modern science, has, if one may judge by current literature, been also accepted by most educated people who have thought about the subject. Notwithstanding, Father Drummond has taken upon himself the responsibility of stating in public that there is "overwhelming evidence" disproving man's evolution. Of course, Father Drummond may be right, and such men as Darwin, Wallace, Huxley, Romanes, Haeckel and many others, who have spent a great part of their lives in patiently and dispassionately examining at first hand the facts upon which the theory of evolution is based, may be all wrong. Equally wrong may also be the present teachers of biology in the universities of the world and the text books which they use. But until Father Drummond produces his "strong proofs" and his "overwhelming evidence" that his negations were justified I shall be content to express my entire agreement with a statement made by Professor Huxley, as far back as 1876 in a lecture delivered in New York upon "The Demonstrative evidence of evolution," namely, "The whole evidence is in favor of evolution and there is none against it." The collection of a vast mass of further data during the last thirty years has only served to give additional weight to this carefully-formed conclusion.

When I reflect how long the half-way

evolution theory, such as Father Drummond holds, has been discarded in the world of biology and by those who have kept themselves abreast of their time in scientific matters, I am reminded of a passage from a celebrated play:

"What may this mean,
That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel,

Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous?"

When I came to this up-to-date city of Winnipeg a few months ago, I little expected to meet with the ghost of a long-deceased scientific theory. But such has been the case, and the "dead corse" has afforded me one of the most remarkable of my new experiences.

A. H. REGINALD BULLER.

The University of Manitoba,
The Botanical Department, Dec. 20.

To the Editor of the Free Press.

Sir—Professor Buller, in his letter published by you on December 23rd, says that in my letter of December 16th, which appeared in your evening issue of the 17th and in your morning issue of the 19th, I "avoided" the points he had made and that I "raised a number of side issues, which have nothing whatever to do with the facts upon which the theory of evolution is based." Allow me to say, Sir, that I "avoided" nothing; I simply postponed his points. The words I used prove this. I wrote "Before entering upon any argument, I wish to draw attention to the most striking sentence in Dr. Buller's letter." And further on I wrote: "I think I am justified in putting to Dr. Buller a question which will serve, so to speak, to clear the decks for action."

Upon his answer to that question will depend my line of argument. Surely these words prove clearly that I had no intention of shirking the questions urged by the learned professor. Neither did I "raise a number of side issues which have nothing whatever to do with the facts upon which the theory of evolution is based." Professor Buller adds that my quotation from an act of parliament and "an expression of opinion on the mysteries of man's inner life are quite irrelevant in this connection." The "number of side issues" is thus reduced to two, and they are not side issues at all. They are, on the contrary, extremely relevant to the main question of the origin of man. The two points I raised are materialism on the one hand, and the spirituality of the human soul on the other. The materialistic view that even man's soul is evolved from brute ancestors is certainly repugnant to the traditions of what has hitherto been a Christian university, and to dismiss a plain, straightforward interrogation bearing directly on the origin of the human soul with the remark that it is an irrelevant "expression of opinion on the mysteries of man's inner life," is a distinct and weak avoidance of the crucial question. Professor Buller does not merely adjourn his reply to my point-blank question; he refuses to give any.

He then proceeds to defend his own position by an appeal to authority. Even if his sweeping assertion were true, that "biologists" that is to say, of course, "all" biologists, "do not think the matter open for further discussion among themselves," this would not be conclusive for the independent thinker, who looks for proofs, not great names nor a popular verdict on what the masses cannot understand. But it is not true that all biologists hold man's descent from a lower animal. In England, perhaps, where the glamor of great names, such as those whom Professor Buller mentions, has more weight with unphilosophical scientists than the cogency of direct proof, there may be a sort of general acceptance of the theory of man's simian descent; but this is not the case in France and Germany. Quatrefage's objections to the theory have never been answered, and Virchow saw no sufficient proofs of man's pithecoïd origin. The five men, whose names are flourished before me as if they ought to make me hide my diminished head, were all materialists and all, except Wallace and perhaps Romanes, remained so till the end. Wallace, after the first illusions of imaginative youth had been dispelled, has become a professed spiritualist. Darwin was quite incapable of close and sustained reasoning. His favorite forms of argument are: "We may infer," "I am doubtfully inclined to believe," "I cannot doubt," "it appears to me almost certain." From a series of "perhapses" his followers, rather than Darwin himself, who is seldom positive about any conclusion, conclude "therefore," which is a process altogether worthy of their mental training. Professor Buller asserts that all these five men "spent a great part of their lives in patiently and dispassionately examining" the facts. Patiently, yes; dispassionately, no, except in the case of Darwin, who, having no grasp

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of any ideals, was necessarily a stranger to all emotion. But Huxley was a passionate hater of Christianity. His biography shows him to have been sadly wanting in sincerity. Now, an insincere man, armed with varied and recondite information, can easily deceive the unwary. The bare assertions of such a man, unsupported by proof, inspire no trust. Even his immediate inferences from observed facts were often at fault, as in the case of his famous "Bathybius," which he discovered, christened and triumphantly proclaimed to the world as "a vast sheet of living matter enveloping the whole earth beneath the seas," and which was soon rejected with derisive laughter by his fellow scientists, who found it to be nothing but a form of the calcium salts of seawater. Haeckel is a bitter foe of all believers in a personal God. His "Riddle of the Universe" is an illogical medley of unproved affirmations, shameless distortions of Theism and Christianity, and shallow sophistry. "These be thy gods," O Buller!

In the face of such worship of materialistic heroes I maintain my right to receive a categorical "yes" or "no," to the question:

Does Professor Buller hold that the soul of man is a spiritual substance? This is no "mystery of the inner life," but a direct inference from elementary psychological data. On this question are based the strongest arguments against man's descent from an anthropoid ape. If Professor Buller again shirks the issue I decline all further discussion.

Ghostly jokes about ghosts and corpses do not strike me with any argumentative force. Even if all Professor Buller's world were against me—which I deny—I should still have more than half the civilized world of independent thinkers on my side. That the opinion of these latter has some weight in the practical world of men is shown by the fact that the Universal Cyclopaedia, published in 1900, deemed it necessary to have two articles on Evolution, one for, the other against. The former appeals vividly to the imagination by accumulating unproved assertions, the latter convinces the intellect by lucid reasoning on well ascertained facts.

As I foresee that Professor Buller may refuse to give a straightforward answer to my question, I will bring this letter to a close by setting myself right with the public on Professor Buller's original presentment of my case. As I said in my letter of December 20, "the report which Dr. Buller quotes from your columns, though substantially correct so far as it goes, is very incomplete, since it does not represent more than a small portion of what I said on this point in my sermon of the 5th inst." That sermon was concerned with original sin. I held that the consequences of original sin were writ large in the history of the human race and that one of the chief reasons why many men did not see this plain writing was the unjustifiable hold evolution has upon their imaginations. The theory of evolution has been applied to spheres in which this application is not warranted by facts. One of these spheres is the supposedly indefinite progress of the human race.

I said that there will always be overwhelming arguments, not "against the theory of the progress of man," as your reporter makes me say, "but against the theory of the indefinite and continual progress of the human race in

all lines of mental and moral perfection." I expressly admitted that there has been progress in many lines, especially in natural science and inventions. But I maintained that history refutes the theory of the continual advance of the entire race in intellectual and moral perfection. History shows that no savage tribe ever became civilized by its own endeavors, unaided by some civilized people; that, until the coming of Christ, religious ideas, except among the Hebrews, instead of improving, grew steadily worse, passing from monotheism to the grossest polytheism, till Pagan Rome worshipped ten thousand gods: that the life of all nations has been a story of early improvement rise to a greater or less eminence, and then decay. While admitting that a certain amount of education was more widespread now than in the past, I held that most of that so-called education was very superficial and that in the higher realms of deep and consecutive thought there was no real, general advance. As to moral perfection, I failed to find it chronicled in the records of our day. On the contrary, I referred to a then very recent article in one of the American magazines, deploring and proving with a wealth of statistics the appalling increase of crime within the last few years in that most "progressive" of nations.

Perhaps this is what Professor Buller would call a logical application of evolution, for "it seems" to him "quite illogical to stop short in its application at man." (Letter of December 10.). But really logic has nothing to do with an unwarranted extension of evolution. Logic is concerned with deductions from facts. If the weight of facts is against extending evolution to man, logic must stop short. What does not stop short but goes blindly ahead, is a love of symmetry, a wish to round out the theory and improve its general appearance. This love and wish spring from the imagination, not from the intellect, and such use of the imagination is certainly not scientific.

LEWIS DRUMMOND, S.J.
St. Boniface, Dec. 31, 1904.

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