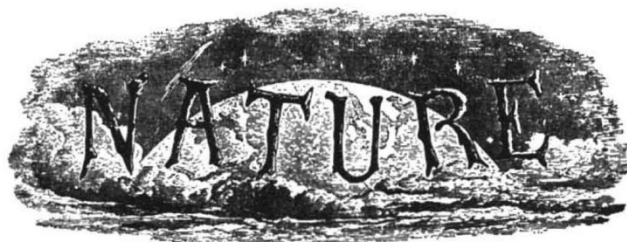


channel for preserving and transporting to the New World the academic traditions of Western Europe, Germany in particular. Since then, the institute has been a powerful stimulus for research in mathematics and the physical sciences and, though it has no formal connexions with undergraduate teaching institutions, the steady stream of visiting fellows through Princeton has helped enormously to enliven universities in the United States. In other words, the Institute of Advanced Study has been, for forty years or more, a powerful demonstration that ivory towers can still function efficiently. It is therefore a great misfortune that it should now be embroiled in an academic quarrel which, if the faculty does not watch its step in the next few weeks, could easily undermine much of what has been accomplished in the past forty years.

The facts are these. Dr Carl Kaysen, who succeeded Oppenheimer as director in 1967, has let it be known from the start that he would add a social science faculty to the three which have been there from the beginning—mathematics, physics and history. In 1970, Professor Clifford Geertz of the University of Chicago was appointed as the first tenured member of a social sciences faculty, apparently without dissent. More recently, there has been argument about the appointment of Dr Robert N. Bellah, a sociologist from Berkeley, to the same faculty. Dr Bellah is a specialist in the influence of religious symbolism on social structures. His proposed appointment to the faculty, advocated by Kaysen and Geertz, was considered by the combined faculty of the institute on January 15 and voted against by a margin of thirteen to eight. It seems to be agreed that while the recommendations of individual faculties of the institute on proposed internal appointments should be for all practical purposes mandatory, the faculty as a whole has only an advisory function in recommendations to appoint to newly established programmes such as that in the social sciences, which is why Dr Kaysen was within his rights in recommending to the trustees of the institute that Dr Bellah should be appointed. The outcome has, however, been unpleasant. For one thing, Dr Bellah's work is now being openly criticized by the faculty, many members of which are advocating a measure of faculty power that would give them ultimate responsibility for all tenured appointments. There is also an undercurrent of complaint at Dr Kaysen's administration of the institute and a group of fourteen members of the faculty have asked that there should be an outside scrutiny of "the director's stewardship", as a result of which a panel of the trustees is planning to hear views on this controversial subject this Saturday, March 24. Nobody would be surprised, but most people would be disconsolate, if the outcome were, now or at some time in the future, the director's resignation.

This is why it is important that there should be a better sense of moderation in this kind of academic community. Whatever the merits or defects of Dr Bellah's scholarship, it is absurd for anybody at Princeton to suggest that a single appointment can entirely change the character of the faculty. Of that there can be no dispute. Good institutions are precisely those which should be able to accommodate unevenness. The central issue is whether a faculty of twenty-six (enlarged to twenty-seven by Dr Bellah's presence) should have the close degree of control over all academic appointments which the dissidents at Princeton seem to want. It is hard to avoid the impression

that there is an element of dissent from Dr Kaysen's plan for a social science programme in what the dissident members of the faculty have been saying. For several years, the new director has not troubled to conceal his impatience with the narrowness of the institute's chief lines of inquiry, and it is entirely proper that if a new faculty is to be created in the social sciences, he should have an important say in its composition. From the outside at least, what the faculty is asking for is a degree of control over academic innovation which is in many ways intolerant. Unless the dissident members are somehow able to make their arguments less pernicious, they will find that they have done more damage to the institution they say they wish to defend than any number of unsatisfactory appointments might accomplish.



SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

THE doctrine of the "survival of the fittest" must be strangely understood in some quarters. The American papers report Prof. Agassiz as having expressed himself in this wise at a recent meeting of the Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture, of which he is a member:—"I do not know how animals originated; a brilliant imagination that of Darwin; a very necessary faculty in the scientist. The sense I know too well to misquote him. Hasty generalising of observation is Darwin all over. Natural selection is out of generation. Natural necessity, what is it? Do we find that only the strong beget families? *Observe plants at the foot of the White mountains, where are large trees, and so up to the summit, where they are mere shrubs.* The weak may and do survive as well as the strong. Ignorance lies at the base of the discussion."

Probably no one naturalist, however eminent, can be expected to know everything, or even all simple things. Can it be possible that Prof. Agassiz supposes (as his argument seems to require) that the dwarf trees in question grow and survive near the top of the mountain, *notwithstanding* they are not the fittest, rather than *because* they are the fittest, for the conditions? And does he conceive the doctrine of natural selection to be founded upon some idea of an abstract fitness, irrespective of the conditions, and not upon the survival of the fittest under and in consequence of the conditions? Surely the argument brought against the doctrine is a good illustration in its favour, only an extremely simple and elementary one.

We never could quite comprehend why Prof. Agassiz should give himself so heartily and persistently to the work of demolishing the doctrine of the derivation of species, in all its forms, considering how large and honourable a part he has himself taken in laying the foundation upon which the modern doctrine has been built. Of these foundations none is stronger than the capital one, generally supposed to be established by him, that the succession of species in time corresponds mainly with that in systematic rank, and is also somehow paralleled in the development of each individual of the higher ranks. So that, in view of his continued but unsuccessful efforts to drive the incoming doctrine out of the land, we could imagine him addressing his own important discoveries in the words used by Balak to Balaam:—"What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and behold, thou hast blessed them altogether."

From *Nature*, 7, 404, March 27, 1873.