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Darwin in luxurious surroundings

J.S. Jones

Charles Darwin: A Centennial Commemorative.

Edited by Roger G. Chapman and Cleveland T. Duval.

Nova Pacifica, Wellington, New Zealand/Croom Helm: 1982. £350, edition limited to 750 copies.

CHARLES Darwin received an annual income of £350 from the *Origin of Species*. By spending only one year's royalties from his greatest work he could now afford to buy this extravagant celebration of its contents. Entirely produced in New Zealand, and bound in calf by the Government Printing Office, 750 copies have been printed to grace the shelves of discriminating Darwinians. Eleven chapters by different authors discuss Darwin's life, the *Beagle* voyage, and the impact of Darwin's work on science, religion and society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The book's contents are of as much interest to the historian as to the biologist, and the diversity of topics and authors leads to a certain unevenness. Thus, in one chapter we are told that DNA can be seen (if suitably stained) to make up threadlike structures called chromosomes, while elsewhere we learn that Stradivarius violins and circuses are among the products of evolution which probably do not result directly from natural selection.

The quotations from Darwin and his contemporaries contrast in their vigour and directness with the pallid academic prose which too often surrounds them. Responses to the theory of evolution were extreme: among geologists, Geikie saw the *Origin* as a "great symphony . . . where the deep undertones of geology seldom fail to be audible", but Sedgwick "laughed at parts of it until my sides were almost sore".

Look at primates!

R.D. Martin

A Complete Guide to Monkeys, Apes and Other Primates.

By Michael Kavanagh.

Cape/University of Oregon Press: 1983. Pp.224. £10.95, \$19.95.

BOOKS on primates, at any level, have a wide potential readership and the demand has been met by a constant flow of new publications. Confronted with such a wide choice, it is difficult for the general reader to select a popular book that reflects (as it should) a distillation of established knowledge. With Michael Kavanagh's *Guide to Monkeys, Apes and Other*

Social theorists had equally opposed and eloquently expressed views. To many, evolutionary theory justified the existing order. T.H. Huxley claimed that Darwinism should prove to the working man that "it is better for himself, better for his own people, and better for future generations that he should starve than steal". Walter Bagehot, however, said of Adam Smith's attempts to trace the evolution of human societies that they showed "how, from being a savage, man rose to be a Scotchman".

Quotations from the great Victorians are accompanied by many contemporary illustrations, including no less than six cartoons showing Darwin as an ape. Some of them seem to have been chosen mainly for decoration, however; for example, a gloomy lithograph of a railway accident is included because of the effect which the contemplation of such disasters had on the religious views of Herbert Spencer.

There are also some unexpected insights into Darwin himself. His most abiding memory of his voyage around the world was of "one continual puke", and in a fit of absent-mindedness in South America Darwin cooked and ate the first specimen of the flightless bird *Rhea darwini*. We discover also that although in his first year at Edinburgh Darwin took out 46 books from the University Library (including Pemberton on Viscera), in his second year he took out none at all. It is rather a surprise to find how close Darwin came to the Mendelian ideas of dominance and recessivity; his plant breeding experiments showed that the characters of the offspring depended on "the same character being present and visible in one of the breeds which are crossed, and latent or invisible in the other".

All in all, this book is a worthy attempt to put Darwinism into its historical context. However, most students will have to wait for the paperback. □

J.S. Jones is in the Department of Genetics and Biometry, University College London.

Primates, such readers can rest assured; Kavanagh has certainly done his homework to produce a text that is basically reliable as well as being eminently readable.

The words "complete guide" in the title are no idle boast. There is a substantial account of every genus of living primate and each genus profile is accompanied by an accurate distribution map and at least one colour photograph. Each profile begins by providing useful standard data (e.g. on physical characteristics and body weight), but then concentrates on summarizing present knowledge about the natural behaviour and ecology of primates. Here lies the book's greatest strength: Kavanagh has clearly made a concerted effort to familiarize himself with the vast literature generated by several decades of detailed primate field studies. The excellent