*The Literary Digest for March 25, 1922*

# DARWINISM IN THE SCHOOLS

DARWIN'S FAMILY TREE is being severely tossed about by the winds of theological controversy, and in Kentucky the other day it came very near to being uprooted altogether when a bill to bar the teaching of the theory of evolution in any of the tax-supported institutions of that State failed of passage in the Legislature by the narrow margin of only one vote. Tho the fight against the much discust theory is apparently lost in the Blue Grass State, it is not relinquished elsewhere, and in New York, according to newspaper report, the Rev. John Roach Straton, a prominent Baptist pastor, has announced that as a member of the executive committee of the Fundamentalist Movement he will seek to bar the Darwinian theory from New York's school curriculum.

Chief among the opponents of the theory of evolution is William Jennings Bryan, who, from the public platform and the printed forum, has attacked it as being no more than a worthless guess and has dilated extensively on the dangers to religion and morals he believes will follow if it is taught in school and college. On the other hand, scholars, preachers and public men throughout the country have called the attempt thus to oust Darwinism from the schools archaic and freakish, dishonoring to God, un-American, and intellectual suicide; and have declared, according to the Louisville *Courier-Journal* that the passage of the bill would mark Kentucky as a community of reactionaries and make the State the laughing stock of the world. It is said to be bad enough that Wilbur Glenn Voliva, successor of the late John Alexander Dowie as overseer of Zion City, Illinois, and head of the Christian Apostolic Church, has issued orders that the Zion City school children must be taught that the earth is flat. According to Overseer Voliva's theory, the sky is a dome of solid material whose edges "rest on the wall of ice which surrounds the flat world to keep foolhardy mariners from tumbling over the edge." As for the stars, they are "points of light, that is all. They are not worlds, they are not suns. So-called science is a lot of silly rot, and so is so-called medical science and all the rest of their so-called sciences."

The attempt to run Darwin out of Kentucky schools was brought to a head when Mr. Bryan toured the State and then appeared before its Legislature with a prepared attack against the theory of evolution. A bill was introduced making it illegal to teach in any tax-supported schools "Darwinism, atheism, agnosticism, or the theory of evolution in so far as it pertains to the origin of man." Supporters of the bill—eventually defeated by a vote of 42 to 41—maintained that instruction in "Darwinism" could lead only to the destruction of faith in God, tho true religion, says the Indianapolis *News*, has nothing to fear from free investigation of the processes of life. "By such investigation it will be discovered that religion itself is a scientific fact and that the Founder of Christianity has stood and can stand the most searching light of criticism. Instead of removing God from the universe, evolution shows Him to be now and always in the universe."

Mr. Bryan argues, however, that the theory of evolution "naturally leads to agnosticism, and, if continued, finally to atheism." The theory is only a "guess," he maintains in an article in the New York *Times*, because "it has not one syllable in the Bible to support it," because "neither Darwin nor his supporters have been able to find a fact in the universe to support their hypothesis," and because it "is not only without foundation, but it compels its believers to resort to explanations that

are more absurd than anything found in the 'Arabian Nights.'" The real question, insists Mr. Bryan, is, "Did God use evolution as His plan? If it could be shown that man, instead of being made in the image of God, is a development of beasts, we would have to accept it, regardless of its effect, for truth is truth and must prevail. But when there is no proof, we have a right to consider the effect of the acceptance of an unsupported hypothesis." The Bible has been excluded from the schools in many places on the ground that religion should not be taught by those paid by public taxation, observes Mr. Bryan; and if this doctrine is sound, he argues, "what right have the enemies of religion to teach irreligion in the public schools? If the Bible can not be taught, why should Christian taxpayers permit the teaching of guesses that make the Bible a lie? A teacher might just as well write over the door of his room, 'Leave Christianity behind you, all ye who enter here,' as to ask his students to accept an hypothesis directly and irreconcilably antagonistic to the Bible." Moreover:

"Our opponents are not fair. When we find fault with the teaching of Darwin's unsupported hypothesis, they talk about Copernicus and Galileo and ask whether we shall exclude science and return to the Dark Ages. Their evasion is a confession of weakness. We do not ask for the exclusion of any scientific truth, but we do protest against an atheist teacher being allowed to blow his guesses in the face of the student. The Christians who want to teach religion in their schools furnish the money for denominational institutions. If atheists want to teach atheism, why do they not build their own schools and employ their own teachers? If a man really believes that he has brute blood in him, he can teach that to his children at home or he can send them to atheistic schools, where his children will not be in danger of losing their brute philosophy, but why should he be allowed to deal with other people's children as if they were little monkeys?

"We stamp upon our coins 'In God We Trust'; we administer to witnesses an oath in which God's name appears; our President takes his oath of office upon the Bible. Is it fanatical to suggest that public taxes should not be employed for the purpose of undermining the nation's God? When we defend the Mosaic account of man's creation and contend that man has no brute blood in him, but was made in God's image by separate act and placed on earth to carry out a divine decree, we are defending the God of the Jews as well as the God of the Gentiles; the God of the Catholics as well as the God of the Protestants. We believe that faith in a Supreme Being is essential to civilization as well as to religion and that abandonment of God means ruin to the world and chaos to society.

"Let these believers in 'the tree man' come down out of the trees and meet the issue. Let them defend the teaching of agnosticism or atheism if they dare. If they deny that the natural tendency of Darwinism is to lead many to a denial of God, let them frankly point out the portions of the Bible which they regard as consistent with Darwinism, or evolution applied to man. They weaken faith in God, discourage prayer, raise doubt as to a future life, reduce Christ to the stature of a man, and make the Bible a 'scrap of paper.' As religion is the only basis of morals, it is time for Christians to protect religion from its most insidious enemy."

Educators and religious leaders all over the country were up in arms immediately when the proposed Kentucky anti-evolution bill was noised abroad, and numerous telegrams were sent to President Frank L. McVey, of the University of Kentucky, in response to his request for opinions on the proposed measure. Such an act, wrote Dr. Lyman Abbott, editor of *The Outlook* (New York), "would be fatal to the best interests of pupils in any school in which it could be enforced. Evolution is correctly defined by John Fiske as God's way of doing things. Practically all scientists hold it and most colleges teach it in some form." "To prohibit the scientific teaching of the facts of evolution would involve adopting the intellectual attitude of the twelfth

century," declared Dr. James R. Angell, president of Yale University. "It is a proposition which could not be seriously entertained by any really intelligent person." Prohibiting the teaching of evolution, said President A. Lawrence Lowell, of Harvard University, "is antediluvian folly," and Dr. Charles S. McFarland, General Secretary of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, declared that "any attempt to impose legislative restrictions on the teachers of science is contrary to all the principles on which the American Republic has been founded." Mr. Bryan, for whose "intense religious spirit" it has "the highest respect, is one of those persons," says the *Rocky Mountain News*, "who are trying to turn back the clock in the domain of religious thought." "If children be taught that religious faith is necessarily tied to theories of verbal inspiration of the Scriptures and the special creation by Divine fiat of each of the many species of life on this planet, it will not be surprizing if shipwreck be made of their faith when they begin to face the facts of history and science. . . . Science has not shaken the fact of Christ. Scholarship has only helped to make it stand out more clearly. As the years pass and the complexities of living multiply, with increasing sense of common responsibility for the welfare of mankind, the conviction deepens in the souls of men that if we would be saved we must seek and find the way of God, and that in Jesus Christ we have the only certain leader in that way." The truth is, says the *Western Christian Advocate* (Methodist), that Christian thinkers have taken over the theory of evolution "and adopted it as one of the greatest doctrines used to-day in support of the Christian theory." But the *Catholic Standard and Times* (Philadelphia) thinks that the scientific doctrine has not been proven and that, therefore, it would be unfair to use it in a course of instruction. "Fit matter for teaching in schools is the certainly established truth and nothing else. The school can not be made the playground for scientific controversies. These must be confined to the circles that are able to appreciate the nice distinction between a mere hypothesis and a firmly ascertained truth. For that reason Darwinism has no place in our schools. The specific form of evolution which it teaches has been entirely discredited."