

# LITERATURE REVIEWS

*Readers are invited to submit reviews of current books or journal articles relating to origins. Please submit contributions to: ORIGINS, Geoscience Research Institute, 11060 Campus St., Loma Linda, California 92350. The Institute does not distribute the publications reviewed; please contact the publisher directly.*

## DARWIN HIMSELF

*Reviewed by Henry Zuill*

*62 Norwood Dr., Norman, Arkansas 71960*

**ANNIE'S BOX: CHARLES DARWIN, HIS DAUGHTER, AND HUMAN EVOLUTION.** Randal Keynes. 2001. London: Fourth Estate, a division of HarperCollins Publishers. 331 p. 34 plate + 19 text illustrations. Cloth, £16.99. ISBN 1-84115-060-6.

Randal Keynes, author of *Annie's Box*, is the great-great-grandson of Charles and Emma Darwin. Thus, he has direct access to family papers and other materials pertaining to the life of Charles Darwin. Some of these historical records are new to the public. He has drawn on these, and other contemporary writings, to reconstruct the Darwin family's daily life, and show how it contributed to Charles' thinking as he developed ideas about evolution, particularly human evolution.

The book is historically interesting, but recommending it requires qualifications based on what readers anticipate. Some may hope Keynes has new insights into Darwin's ideas. However, anyone, who anticipates new understandings about evolution, will be disappointed. Others may look for confirmation of an often-rumoured late-life conversion. Likewise, this will not be found. If it happened at all, it is not recorded here.

If one is curious about the mindset of Darwin, however, then *Annie's Box* will be helpful. The book gives an intriguing description of the man himself, and how and why he reached his opinions. Often, Darwin is either eulogized or demonised; here, however, we find neither. In this balance, I believe Keynes makes a contribution.

*Annie's Box* is arranged chronologically from when Darwin was beginning his career and marriage, through the years of child rearing, to

old age, and finally death. Charles Darwin was a complex man, and as presented in *Annie's Box*, he embodied a peculiar mix of emotions — gentleness, egocentricity, timidity, determination, and even bigotry. There is some of each of these qualities in every person. Seeing them here reminds readers that objectivity is hard to achieve.

Several threads weave through *Annie's Box* and sometimes intertwine. One thread deals with Charles' spiritual doubts in contrast with Emma's steady faith. When Charles' learned about vast geological ages, he began to doubt the biblical creation account, and in turn, this produced doubts about the rest of the Bible. For example, he saw the God of the Old Testament as a vengeful tyrant. Thus that part of Scripture was dismissed. The New Testament, based on Old Testament prophecies, likewise had to go. His upbringing and theological training had not given him an active faith, and when science raised serious questions, he was swept away. Eventually this led him to reject all of Scripture as divine revelation.

Sometimes he doubted his doubts, but always returned to them. He eventually saw himself as an agnostic as opposed to being an atheist, but he seems to have given the Creator little, if any, benefit of the doubt. Agnostics are often difficult to distinguish from outright unbelievers.

Darwin was determined to make a scientific name for himself, and focused on natural selection as a mechanism to not only explain evolution, but also serve as his vehicle on the road to fame. Though a careful observer of nature, he was obsessed with his species theory, and often extrapolated far beyond the limits of data. The picture that comes through is that, as a scientist, he was considerably less than objective. He was convinced that he was right and once referred to his theory as "all gospel." In his view, natural selection had unrestricted powers.

Perhaps we can be more understanding of Darwin, given his limited view of nature. On the other hand, today's scientists who do the same thing in the light of far more extensive understanding of such things as the limiting nature of genes, and the fossil record, cannot be so easily dismissed.

Another intriguing theme concerns Darwin's views of suffering in nature. At that time, children often died early. Three of the ten Darwin children did not reach adulthood. Two died in infancy, but Annie, for whom the book is titled, was ten when she succumbed to what appears to have been tuberculosis. Readers will be charmed by the description

of this little girl, and will share in the grief that followed the family, particularly Charles and Emma, for the rest of their lives.

In addition to such great and grievous loss, Charles Darwin was often ill. He knew suffering from personal experience.

His grief and illness highlighted the problem of human and animal pain. Emma saw suffering as, in the end, producing a greater good. Charles struggled with this problem for years, and always ended at the same place: that there was no God active in nature. We would do well to re-examine this problem. Each thinking person must grapple with it; established faith, to some degree, depends upon the answer.

Chronic ill-health is another part of the Darwin puzzle. I wondered how prevailing medical misinformation and its horrific applications at that time might have contributed to his problems. His condition seemed to worsen under stress, however; and even at the best of times, whatever it was that so often plagued him never seemed far away. For around twenty years Darwin kept his species theory secret, fearing to make it public. He felt this stressful hesitancy contributed to his bad health — and it probably did. It was a high price to pay.

It is evident that Darwin wanted to be accepted and well thought of. Thus he delayed publishing his theory, clearly recognising its potential for rejection, and himself along with it. That it was so quickly accepted was surprising, possibly even to him. It could not have been because it was so persuasive. Many of his fellow scientists saw its weaknesses. Certainly, the idea of species fixity was easily rejected in light of what was being learned about nature; but its rejection, given its theological and ecclesiastical implications, must have contributed to weakened faith, as it did for Darwin. Moreover, could a general lack of faith, and rejection of moral accountability, have been a major deciding factor in acceptance of Darwin's theory?

It is ironic that the man whose theories did so much to undermine faith is buried in Westminster Abbey.

In summary, *Annie's Box* is a revealing peak into the mind of Darwin. I believe readers will gain new insights into, not only what drove Darwin, but also the social milieu in which his ideas took root.