

Man—Is He Only a Collection of Hereditary Characteristics?

By CARROLL QUIGLEY

THE EVOLUTION OF MAN AND SOCIETY. By C. D. Darlington. Simon & Schuster. 753 pages, \$12.95.

This book is an embarrassment, not, apparently to its author, but certainly to any reviewer. The author is a Fellow of the Royal Society, Sherardian Professor of Botany and Regius Professor of Biology at Oxford University, Director of the Innes Horticultural Institution, and Keeper of the Botanical Gardens at Oxford. He is regarded as a specialist in the genetics of cultivated plants.

The book is a mass of factual errors, omissions, deficient thinking, and careless verbal expression. Part I, with three chapters, is concerned with human evolution, while the remaining 26 chapters largely ignore the important subject of the evolution of human society, offering, instead, a third-rate history textbook.

It is generally agreed today that the evolution of man has been a process, covering over 15 million years, by which a primate which was almost totally dependent for its survival on inherited characteristics was changed into a primate whose survival is today almost totally dependent on learned behavior. There is no similar agreement on the nature of social evolution, but many would feel that the subject should cover the process by which human social groupings changed from cooperative

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bands to kinship groups, culminating in large tribes, then went on to larger and more powerful organizations based on religion (in two distinct stages, which we might call Archaic Kingships and Providential Imperial Monarchies), which were succeeded, after several abortive efforts, by secular states (a period also capable of division into stages such as feudal monarchies, dynastic monarchies, national states, and, today, ideological blocs). I would be prepared to accept any evolutionary stages Darlington might suggest, on their merits. However, he suggests none, because he never discusses the subject. He also omits almost all discussion of human evolution.

The Hybrid Theory

This book does not deal with either of the subjects suggested in the title because Darlington does not believe that man or society evolved in the sense that most people would use that expression. All he believes happened is that men moved around more and more and, as a result, got more and more hybridized. To him men, like hybrid plants, are simply collections of genes, the units of hereditary characteristics, just as they were millions of

years ago. Each individual has his own distinctive gene assortment, which is planted, not in soil, but in his particular social environment. If that social context, like soil for a plant, is favorable, he will develop the characteristics he inherited from his ancestors. But if the social environment is not of the kind necessary for his gene assortment, like a plant in poor soil, he will be distorted and crippled in his growth. Darlington is no more interested in the evolution of society than he, as a grower of plants, is concerned with the geological evolution of the soil into which he puts his seed. As for man, Darlington has no conception of the evolutionary process by which man obtained a less and less fixed and an increasingly plastic potentiality capable of learning a wider and wider range of behavioral patterns depending on the environment he grows in. That would mean men are free; to Darlington they are not free at all, but either develop in the way their hereditary genes indicate or are unable to do so and are distorted.

Darlington carries his belief in inherited characteristics to an extreme degree, believing that all man's activities are inherited, including language, the tools he uses, and all social organizations. When I was living in Oxford in 1961, I heard him argue for an hour and a half that all human traits were inherited. He told me that "a pure Negro" whose

family had lived in America for centuries still inherits the ability to speak the Bantu languages of Africa and can learn to speak English only with great difficulty, and "never correctly." I told him that the most beautiful English I ever heard spoken was by a Negro poet, Langston Hughes. Some years ago, the acting French Ambassador here told me that the most eloquent speakers of French were Negro and that the two best poets in French were Senegalese. Darlington waved such objections aside. I left his laboratory in 1961 without understanding his position; now, from reading his book, I understand it, but I find it less convincing than ever.

Position on Language

His position on language is stated here (pp. 35-37). But he goes much further: even use of tools is inherited. Thus, among the ancient Jews, the Tribe of Judah used spear and shield, while the Tribe of Benjamin used bow and slings because these tribes were of different "racial origins" (p. 174, n. 3). Yet Darlington is not really a racist, even though he believes in "pure races," for, like any expert on cultivated plants, he believes in hybridization and is all for it. Until this is achieved for all men, he wants what he calls "stratified societies" where persons with different inherited talents can find specialized activities to use these, as, he says, the Mafia were able "to grasp the opportunities of the modern

world. . . . They came to America" (p. 610).

Throughout this book, the word "hybridization" is used instead of "evolution." The volume consists largely of unproved assertions that what happened in the past was the result of mixtures of genes. Many of these statements are demonstrably untrue, irrelevant, or outrageous. These changes in gene pools resulted from man's increased "hybridization, which came from his increased moving about, caused by the climatic changes of the last million years, according to Darlington. As a result of these changes and hybridization, man constantly finds himself in situations where his inherited characteristics do not fit his environmental context and he is called upon to live in situations which distort his "instinctive" abilities.

Darlington's obsession with hybridization as the key to all past events makes it unnecessary for him to examine what happened in the past or why it happened because he already knows. As a result, this book is filled with errors. There is no space to list them but I

can give a few: he speaks of the history of "alphabets" (p. 101), when he means the history of writing; since he lists as the first example "Sumerian ideographs," which are a thousand or more years before the first alphabet; he says that Sumerian was a "tonal" language, which it was not (p. 100); he uses "Aryan" when he means "Indo-European" and thus speaks of "Aryan invaders" of Italy in the Bronze Age (p. 235); he says "monkey" when he means "primate" (p. 21) and lists the evolutionary changes of the lemurs as changes in "monkeys."

Students of man and societies today are very careful to use different terms for race, language, customs, and chronological periods; Darlington uses the same word for all of them, without discrimination, because to him they are all gene pools. Thus he speaks of paleolithic men, paleolithic languages, paleolithic customs, paleolithic times, and even "paleolithic plants" (p. 75). All hunters of today are "paleolithic," and any man, like Lenin, who likes to hunt is "paleolithic" (p. 558). He believes that the lower classes of our society are made up of paleolithic people and "noth-

ing but hybridization will change" such hunters (p. 30). Their customs (he calls them "habits") are genetic and "can be described most exactly in terms of the genetics of colour blindness" (p. 29).

Accordingly, if Darlington wants to know what the hunters of 20,000 years ago were like, he does not have to investigate archaeological works; he can just look at modern hunters, who, he believes, will be the same because it is the same combination of genes.

By concentrating on human evolution only in the last million years, when most human evolution took place between 19 and 1 million years ago, Darlington leaves out almost all the story (and makes the error greater by calling his few erroneous comments "human origins"). Thus he has nothing on the shift from tree-living to terrestrial living, or from forests to grasslands, or upright posture and bipedalism, or on the development of the hand, loss of hair, changes in diet and teeth (except for one erroneous remark on canine teeth), or changes in emotions, growth of cooperation and mutual dependence, and much else. His misunderstanding of the process of human evolution is revealed in his reference to the only physical change he more than mentions. This is the great increase in the size of the human skull about 700,000 years ago. He says (p. 24), "Woman's pelvis grew no larger and pregnancy remained at the same length at about 38 weeks." The length of the gestation period, either before or after the increase in head size is something of which we know nothing, but what Darlington says is impossible. We believe that as the skull grew larger, any tendency toward premature birth became an advantage in survival of woman at the cost of increased infant helplessness and increased adult need for cooperation and mutual dependence.

Errors in History

The historical portion of this book is filled with errors. I shall restrict my comments to the few pages concerned with Islam, not that this is worse than other parts (the pages on ancient Greece are much worse) but simply because the errors on Islam could have been avoided easily simply by looking up a few words in the single volume "Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam" which is available in the libraries of every major city including Oxford.

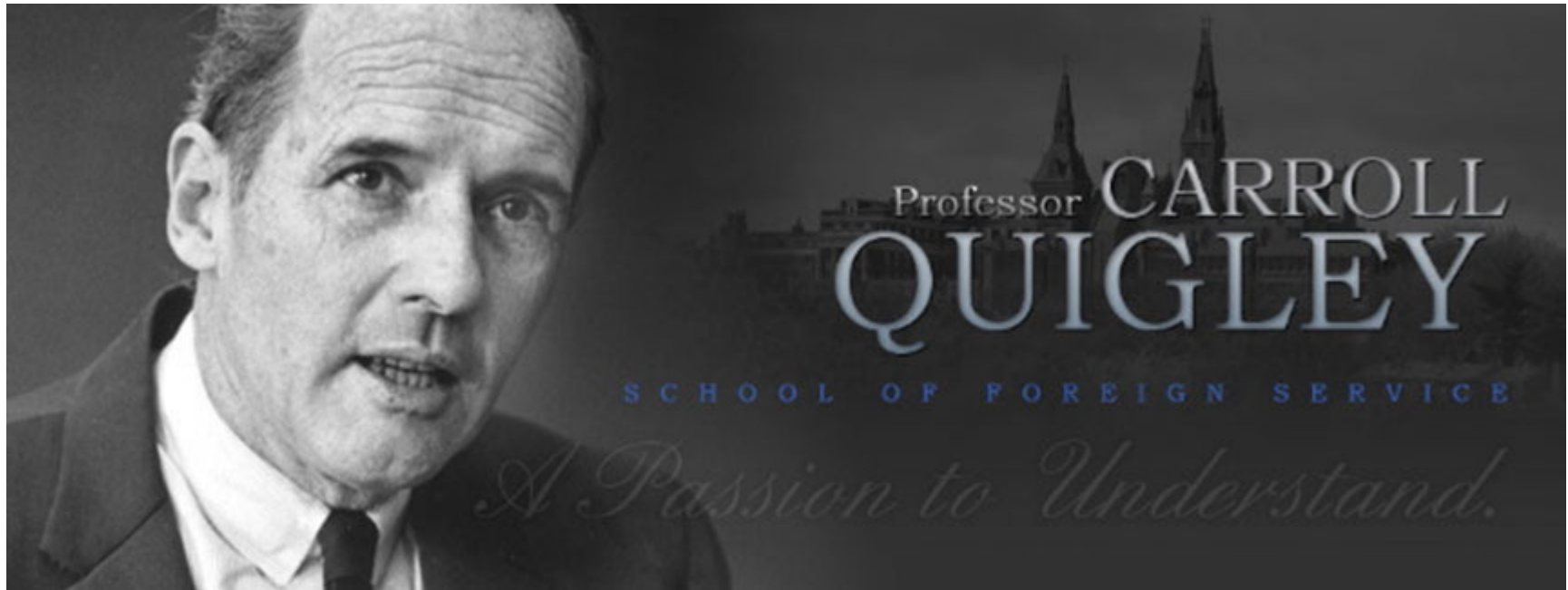
On Islam Darlington has 23 errors of fact in seven pages (333-339). Mecca, he says, had 36 clans; the Ka'ba shrine in that city, in the sixth century, was "a great stone cube"; Muhammad's revelations were passed on in secret so that a secret brotherhood was created." When Mecca rejected Muhammad, says Darlington, "Muhammad with his faithful band took refuge in flight. They escaped to the north to a

rival commercial settlement high up on the mountain ridge. It was a place called Yathrib . . . with a rich cultured governing class using the Hebrew alphabet for a Yiddish kind of language."

That last quotation has five errors in it: Muhammad fled with no band, but with a single companion; they went to a purely agricultural oasis with no commercial interests, which was on a flat plain so extensive that the view to the south, according to Buhl, the standard biographer of Muhammad, "stretches away farther than the eye can reach." The Jews in the town spoke and wrote the same language as all other Arabs there and were not distinguishable from them except by religion. The idea that they spoke anything remotely like a Germanic dialect such as Yiddish is a fair sign of Darlington's ignorance of languages, a subject on which he has published a number of scholarly papers, although this book is full of errors of fact on languages. If Darlington had merely looked up four words in the "Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam" (Mecca, Madina, Muhammad, and Ka'ba), he would not have made these nine errors: Mecca had about ten clans; in the sixth century, the Ka'ba was still a wooden enclosure without any roof, and, when it burned in the early seventh century, was re-built, with a roof, with wood from a ship wrecked in the Red Sea; there was nothing secret about Muhammad's mission from the beginning, which is why he was called "the Messenger" (which is the title of Bodley's biography, the one most frequently met with and used in Oxford): From the first revelation Muhammad saw his mission to warn the people of Mecca of the Last Judgement, which he believed was probably imminent.

There is no need to labor Darlington's errors on all aspects of the subject of this book. His conviction that he has the single key, "hybridization," which will unlock every event of the past, explains the basis of these errors. But it does not explain why he is a world-famous "scholar," was invited speaker at the tercentenary of the Royal Society in 1961, and holds two professional chairs at one of the World's greatest universities.

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