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Green Eye of the Storm

John Rendle-Short

Edinburgh UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998

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The above book is sub-titled: 'Controversy between Science and Christianity'. It is traced in the lives of four people who are listed here in the order of the text rather than of the title page:

I Philip Henry Gosse (1810-1888)

II George John Romanes (1848-1894)

III Arthur Rendle Short (1880-1953)

IV John Rendle-Short, son of Arthur and author of the book.

Arthur Rendle Short and his brother Latimer each had a family of three. Two sons of Latimer are known well in Brethren circles in this country. They are Professor David Short of Aberdeen, retired cardiologist and physician to the Queen, and Dr Stephen Short of Bristol who is within one year of fifty years of itinerant Christian ministry. These two are thus cousins of the author and all three share the same great-grandfather, William Short, teacher at Müller's Orphanage.

The 'Controversy' of the title is that between science and Christianity. The Science addressed by the author is Biology, particularly with reference to Darwinian evolution. The form of Christianity with which the author engages is Christian Brethren. This is not so much deliberate as inevitable since three of the four subjects of the book knew the Brethren scene intimately. George John Romanes is in a different category. This close friend and ardent disciple of Darwin moved from faith and then returned to it in later years.

P.H. Gosse is the principal figure considered from the nineteenth century. He was a man of brilliant mind, a keen student of nature, a Fellow of the Royal Society, a deeply sincere Christian and a member of the early Christian Brethren. His book *Omphalos*, now out of print, attempted to reconcile the declarations of science with recent, instant creation. A newly created tree must have tree-rings, which indicate age. True age and apparent age must differ. By extension of the argument, the earth is apparently older than it really is. The book was not well received and this rejection was compounded after his death when his son Sir Edmund Gosse, as Timothy Stunt notes elsewhere in the current issue, produced an unflattering portrayal of his father in the book *Father and Son* which became a classic.

Arthur Rendle Short is the author's principal choice from the twentieth century. He, like Gosse, had a brilliant mind. He was a student of distinction, with a succession of awards to his name; he became a surgeon. He too was interested in the interface between science and faith. His book *Modern Discovery and the Bible* (1942) was an example of his popular writing in this area. His dedication and commitment in his chosen profession and in his Christian life are discussed. Since the son was an observer at first hand of the father's home life and Christian life, this gives a special dimension to the whole account. It would be true to say, however, that the son saw the father as having an unresolved struggle in the area of science and faith.

John Rendle-Short next tackles the Christian/evolution problem autobiographically. After attempting unsatisfactorily to accommodate evolution in his thinking, he moved to what he considers to be a much more satisfying position. In brief, Genesis 1 is to be interpreted literally. The earth is young; there is no place for Darwinism. His strength of conviction on these matters is sufficient to over-ride objections. He gives reasons for his decision and these are expanded in this, the largest of the four sections of the book. It is a 'Creationist' conclusion, but this is not a standard piece of Creationist literature. It is far too individualistic for that.

It is time to ask how convincing his argument is. Many are convinced that a presumed state of 'warfare' between science and faith is an unhelpful starting point for discussion. We might all agree that there is room for a kindly assessment of Gosse who was so early in the fray. After all, his *Omphalos* went to the printer before Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published. At least he was trying, albeit unsuccessfully, to bring Science and Faith together. However it is the author's representation of Arthur Rendle Short that many would seek to modify. They would cast him in a much more favourable light as one of the founding fathers of today's UCCF and emphasise his standing as one of the great visionaries of his day and generation.

Is the book to be recommended? Undoubtedly. The author writes well. The topic is of perennial interest. The scope of the presentation is to be commended. Interesting comment is made on early and later Brethren practice. The publishers are to be commended on presentation, proofreading and price. The book represents excellent value for money.

A final updating may be in order. There is a current surge of interest in Gosse. Robert Boyd of the Fort William Christian Brethren Assembly continues his interest in all the family. Two further books may be of interest. Note their publication dates:
(1) L. Croft, *The Life of Philip Henry Gosse* (United Kingdom. Elmwood Books (Whitaker) 02/2000), £24.99 ISBN 0 946019 09 6
(2) A. Thwaite, *Philip Henry Gosse* (UK Faber and Faber 31/12/2001), £22.50 Hardback.

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