

ANTHROPOLOGY

Evolution Trial Relived

The Scopes case, in which the freedom of science was on trial, finds its present counterpart in the loyalty oaths, greater classification and growing attitude to reject science.

By WADSWORTH LIKELY

► TWENTY-FIVE years ago—on April 24, 1925—a young high school teacher named John Thomas Scopes was indicted by a grand jury in Dayton, Tenn.

He was indicted for the crime of “unlawfully and willfully teaching in the public schools of Rhea County, Tenn., . . . a certain theory and theories that deny the story of the divine creation of man as taught in the Bible and did teach instead thereof that man is descended from a lower order of animals.”

Two and a half months later, on July 10, in Dayton there began what was known as the “monkey trial.” No trial in history up to that time, and few since, have so excited the interest of the people. Millions of words were written about Scopes, about his defense counsel—Clarence Darrow, Dudley Field Malone, Arthur Garfield Hays—about the Great Commoner who allied himself with the prosecution, William Jennings Bryan.

The trial began as a test case—a test of whether a law-making body had the constitutional power to prevent the teaching of what all recognized scientists said was one of the most fundamental facts of nature, if that fact contradicted some religious beliefs.

Evolution vs. God

The fact in contest was, of course, evolution—that man descended from a lower order of animals, that this descent took millions of years. Evolution was, to the Fundamentalists, a denial of God’s word, the Bible, which says that man was created by God, as he is today, out of the dust of the earth.

On March 21, 1925, Tennessee had passed a law making it a crime to teach the evolution theory in any schools supported in whole or in part by the state. To many of the people in Tennessee, this was a reasonable act. To some other people all over the country, whether they believed literally in the Genesis story of creation or in the scientific story, it was reasonable that a legislature should prescribe what is to be taught in the schools.

But to Scopes, and to the array of legal talent behind him, and to the scientists of the country, no law-making body on earth had the right to prevent the teaching of what they thought to be the truth to the young people of the country. And, if a law-making body did try this, they passionately believed the freedom of science was in

danger, and hence the freedom of all the people was in danger.

Anti-Evolution Laws Still Valid

That anti-evolution law is still on the books of the state of Tennessee, and similar laws are still valid in other states. John Thomas Scopes was found guilty and fined under that law. The State Supreme Court upheld its constitutionality.

But who really won? Science or religion?

Twenty-five years later, most people, including the scientists, would say that both science and religion won. Many people say, and Scopes’ lawyers contended, that the theory of evolution was not actually in conflict with the Bible, that one could be a good Christian and believe in evolution too. They see Genesis, not as literally true, but as the guess of men without scientific knowledge as to how God achieved creation. They say that God used the process of evolution, for which they have abundant evidence, to create man and all living things.

But there is no doubt that, whether Scopes was guilty or not, the teaching of evolution won out. Today, in at least one university in Tennessee, the department of anthropology believes in teaching evolution aggressively. The professors do not merely give their students a smattering of evolution along with the rest of the natural sciences. They are told enough about the evidence of evolution so that they can see for themselves that it is a fact and not a

disputed theory.

Even at Dayton’s William Jennings Bryan University, created in memory of the man who, some believe, gave his life in defense of the Bible, the theory of evolution is presented to the students. However, the school’s catalogue says: “The attitude of the Science Department of this University is that the theory of evolution is not supported by scientific evidence. Facts of nature which prove the theory of evolution to be without sound basis are abundant and are brought to the attention of the student. The facts of science are found to be in harmony with the Bible, our foundation and guide.”

There are still some traces of the kind of thinking which prompted the passing of an anti-evolution law. One government agency, which presents scientific exhibits to the public, avoids the use of the word “evolution” in those exhibits. The word “development” is used instead.

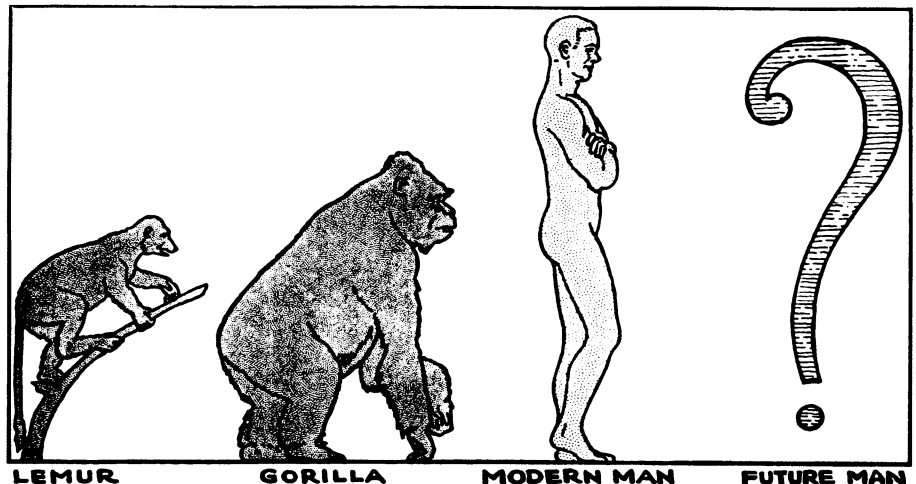
Twenty-five years ago scientists saw a threat to their freedom in anti-evolution laws. They mobilized against those laws. Eminent scientists traveled to Dayton to testify for the defense. Judge J. T. Raulston, however, ruled out their testimony.

Scientific meetings were devoted to the theory of evolution, to ways and means of combatting anti-evolution laws. Scientists realized they would have to band together if what they had learned over the years was not to be kept from the people.

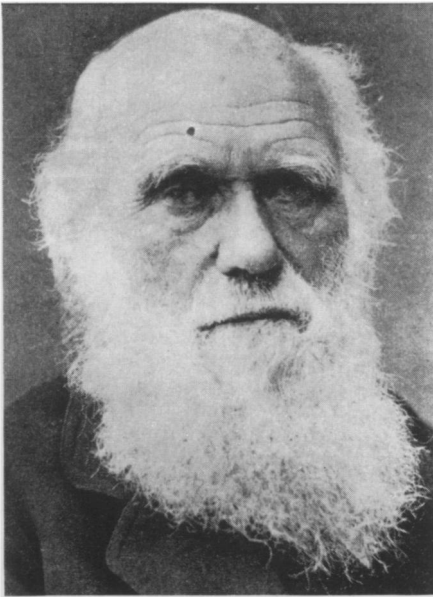
Present Counterpart

Looking back on it, scientists know they won that battle. But what about today? Do similar threats to scientific freedom exist today?

To this question, Dr. Howard Meyerhoff, executive director of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, says, “definitely, yes.” He and other scientists feel that the threat to scientific freedom today is much greater than it was at Dayton.



EVOLUTION THEORY—Twenty-five years ago John Thomas Scopes, a young biology teacher, was indicted because he taught that man was related to the animals in the sketches above and was, in fact, descended from similar animals.



THEORY ORIGINATOR—Charles Darwin, author of the book "The Origin of the Species", first presented evidence for the evolution theory. He traveled around the world in his ship, "Beagle", to collect his evidence.

They see a tendency to restrict the freedom of scientists in the loyalty oaths some universities are asking of teachers, loyalty oaths much more strict than those asked of ordinary government employees. They see a threat in the fact that the House of Representatives could vote into the National Science Foundation bill loyalty provisions which, in the opinion of J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, "would constitute a clear departure from accepted fundamental theories of American government and lay a foundation for criticism of the Bureau as a state police organization."

They think that the tendency of government agencies to classify more and more documents not only hampers science in its job of discovering new knowledge, but also keeps from the people things which they should know.

More important, they are wondering about an attitude which they think might be developing in this country—an attitude which tends to reject science and scientists. They think they see a fear of what science has wrought, a fear which is expressed in the acceptance of fantastic theories about the earth and the skies.

Twenty-five years ago, when Clarence Darrow placed William Jennings Bryan on the witness stand, he asked Bryan whether he really believed that Joshua made the sun stand still. Bryan said he did. He was scoffed at and, some say, as a result of that duel between the agnostic and the fundamentalist, he died a few days later.

But today, national magazines are presenting to the people a theory that the sun actually did stand still—or at least the earth stopped revolving—when Joshua asked it

to do so. This time it is not explained by the will of God, but by a theory concerning the actions of the planet Venus, a theory which is almost unanimously rejected by scientists.

Are scientists mobilizing today against these various threats as they did 25 years ago? Dr. Meyerhoff doesn't see enough evidence of mobilization. He says that most scientists are too anxious to stay within their own fields. But, he says, they'll have to join together and take action if they are to defend their own freedom and, ultimately, the people's freedom.

Science News Letter, April 29, 1950

ENGINEERING

Auto Diesel Engine To Power Indianapolis Racer

➤ A NEW lightweight diesel engine, designed for use in automobiles, will be used to power a car in the Indianapolis "500" automobile race classic this summer, it was revealed in Columbus, Ind., by Cummins Engine Company, Inc.

The new engine has been in use during the past few months in limited numbers in highway trucks. The particular one to be used in the racer is a highly supercharged version. It is a four-cylinder affair with a piston stroke of 401 cubic inches. It is capable of turning up to 4,000 revolutions per minute. It is now undergoing various tests.

Science News Letter, April 29, 1950



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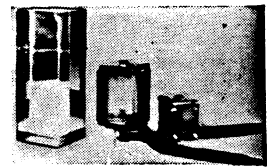
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