

Reviews

Patrick Matthew and Natural Selection. By W. J. Dempster. Paul Harris Publishing, Edinburgh, 1983. 154 pp. U.K. price: £8.95.

IN 1859, Charles Darwin became famous throughout the world, by publishing his book on *The Origin of Species by means of natural selection or the preservation of favoured species in the struggle for life*. In 1860 he was startled to learn from Patrick Matthew, of Gourdie Hill, Errol, Scotland, that he (Matthew) had published the concept of natural selection in 1831 in the miscellaneous notes appended to his treatise *On Naval Timber and Arboriculture*. From 1860 onwards, all editions of *The Origin of Species* contain Darwin's acknowledgement that Matthew had published, in his 1831 book, 'precisely the same view on the origin of species as that . . . propounded by Mr. Wallace and myself'.

But despite Darwin's acknowledgement, Patrick Matthew has been almost totally forgotten. A few writers on evolution (including Samuel Butler) have commented favourably on Matthew's clear statement of the principle of natural selection, but only very brief biographical notes on Matthew had been published.

Matthew was born at Ronie, near Scone, in 1790, and he died at Gourdie Hill in 1874. Darwin was born at Shrewsbury in 1809, and he died at Downe in 1882. The parallels between their lives are remarkable: both men dropped out of medical study at Edinburgh University, travelled extensively and then married a wealthy cousin; both became wealthy country gentlemen and raised large families, studied natural history independently of any institution, published the concept of natural selection, and died of heart disease. Both men were also strongly interested in New Zealand — though Matthew seems never to have been here. Matthew ran a large orchard, growing apples and pears at Gourdie Hill in Perthshire, and he developed a large estate in North Germany, which was taken over by his third son Alexander.

W. J. Dempster, who is an eminent surgeon in England, has now published this brief study of Matthew, who was clearly a remarkable person. He made no pretence of respect for aristocracy or religion, and he gained a local reputation as one who feared neither God nor Devil. His fourth and fifth sons, Charles and James, migrated to New Zealand in 1851 (not 'about 1860', as Dempster writes); and at Matakana in 1855 they set up orchards and nurseries, growing apples and pears from seeds and seedlings sent by their father. Those are said to have been the first commercial orchards in Australasia.

Much of the book is devoted to the relations between Matthew and Darwin, which became friendly and respectful. Dempster's biography could have been improved with tighter editing, since it is exceedingly repetitious. The Appendices with Matthew's writings form the most valuable part of the book. Appendix 1

reprints Matthew's crucial Appendix to his 1831 treatise, Appendix 2 reprints the letters between Matthew and Darwin, and the other Appendices reprint Matthew's letters to newspapers and journals on a variety of topics. (The letters between Matthew and Darwin had been printed by Gavin de Beer in the *Notes and Records of the Royal Society* in 1959).

Dempster laments the paucity of information about Matthew between 1809 and 1860, apart from his publications *On Naval Timber and Arboriculture* in 1831, and *Emigration Fields* in 1839. Dempster describes briefly that latter book as 'simply a traveller's guide to the climate, flora and fauna of the countries suitable for emigrants', and then dismisses it as being 'clearly all derivative'. In fact, *Emigration Fields* consists largely of a detailed proposal by Matthew for the colonization of New Zealand, by working families, in explicit opposition to the Wakefield theories approved by the New Zealand Company. (At the publisher's request, Matthew hastily added brief accounts of other countries suitable for colonization.) He expressed admiration of the Maori, and strongly advocated intermarriage between them and Britons. He urged that the colonists should leave behind the vices of the Old World, such as hereditary aristocracy, feudal land laws and tobacco — lamenting that missionaries in New Zealand had already addicted many Maoris to tobacco.

Moreover, Dempster has overlooked Matthew's *Prospectus of the Scots New Zealand Land Company*, which reports a meeting held at Perth on 24 August 1839 with Patrick Matthew as Chairman. That company developed into the New Zealand, Waitemata, and Manakou Company, which later claimed much of the land around Auckland — Matthew is not listed amongst the Directors of that latter company.

In New Zealand Charles and James Matthew became friends of Sir George Grey, who was an intimate friend of Darwin. A local descendant of Patrick Matthew has a photograph of Charles Matthew's son Duncan in 1886, dressed in the Highland costume presented by his godfather Sir George Grey — and she treasures one of the 200 copies of the 1831 treatise.

Dempster's account of Matthew is an interesting study; but Matthew clearly deserves a much fuller biography.

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Extracts from Journals Relating to the Visit to New Zealand of the French Ship St. Jean Baptiste in December 1769 under the Command of J. F. M. de Surville. Transcribers and translators, Isabel Ollivier and Cheryl Hingley. Alexander Turnbull Library Endowment Trust/National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, 1982. 225 pp. N.Z. price: \$18.95.

The Expedition of the St. Jean Baptiste to the Pacific 1769–1770. By J. de Surville and G. Labé. Translated and edited by John Dunmore. Hakluyt Society, London, 1981. x, 309 pp. U.K. price: £12.00

IT IS now some seventy years since the appearance of McNab's translation of