

# Will Darwin bite the dust in Little Rock?

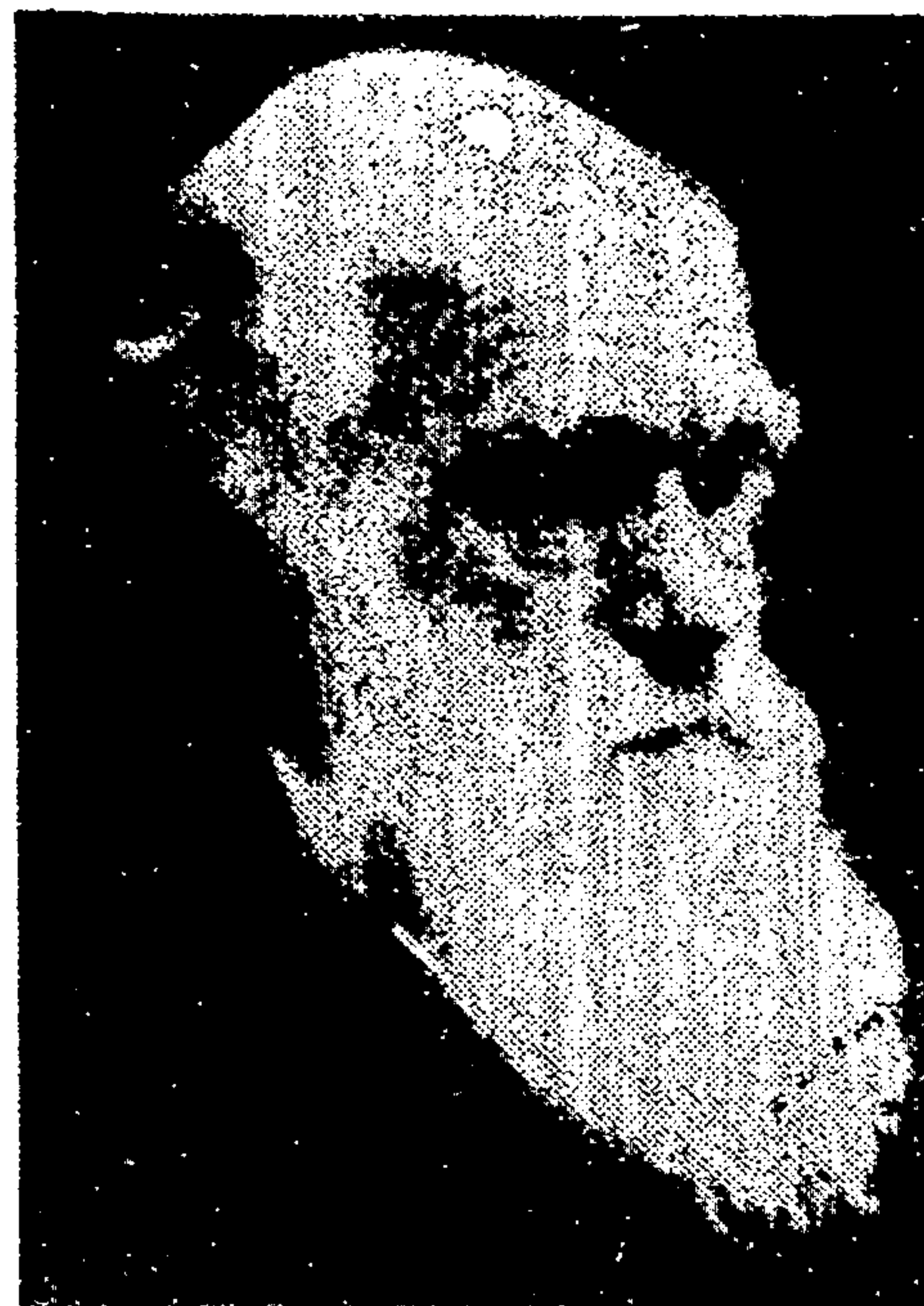
by Sir Fred Hoyle

The schoolchildren of Arkansas have become the focus of one of the last major tussles between Darwinists and creationists — between those who believe in the laws of evolution and those who believe in Genesis. But, as the court hearing begins in Little Rock today, it is Darwin's theories which are likely to be debunked.

The tussle between evolutionists and creationists in the State of Arkansas is a consequence of recent legislation by the state, according to which evolution theory and creation theory are to receive "balanced" treatment in the schools, not equal time as the British press has reported. The tussle is essentially political and legalistic rather than scientific, and there is the possibility that the scientific issues may get lost in a courtroom battle.

Arkansas is not a rich state, industrially or agriculturally. Its

people work hard for a living, hard for the money they pay in taxes to support the local educational system. Their strongly held view is that the schools should in return teach courses which do not make a mockery of the beliefs many of them hold. It is this view that generated the political pressure responsible for the recent legislation, and it is the determination of taxpayers to have some influence on how their money is spent that the American Civil Liberties Union is contesting in this case.



Charles Darwin: in the dock

Under American law, education in the schools is a matter for individual states, unless the practice of states should contravene the Constitution, when the federal authorities are empowered to intervene. The trouble here is that the interpretation of the Constitution can change from month to month according to decisions of the United States Supreme Court, a disturbing situation in which the meaning of the Constitution can easily go out of step with the way that people have become accustomed to feel about issues of public policy.



Sir Fred Hoyle: many doubts

Though my American friends tell me the Constitution requires no religion to be taught in schools, I find it difficult to believe the founding fathers meant any such thing. I suspect what they really meant, in a truly liberal spirit, was that no one religion should receive preference over any other religion. Nevertheless, it seems the Constitution is read nowadays to mean no religion of any kind whatsoever.

The state of Arkansas argues that it is impossible to teach the nature of man without implying some form of

religious statement. It argues that if the schools teach only strict Darwinism, which is what evolution science is defined in the State's legislative document to mean, there must inevitable be an implied denigration of religion, which contradicts in an inverted way the Constitutional requirement that school courses must be free from religion.

So, argues the State, the nature of man and of living things in general should be taught in a balanced way with both the Darwinian point of view and the creationist point of view presented to students.

Not so, argues the American Civil Liberties Union. According to the ACLU, evolution science is proven fact and creation science does not exist. Whether the ACLU regards Darwinism as proven fact is not yet clear, but if it does not do so, the ACLU's case will lack momentum. The state defines creation science in several explicit items, of which the first can be read as a blueprint for the teaching of big-bang cosmology.

The second refers to weaknesses in the Darwinian theory, of which there is plenty. Thereafter, the items of definition degenerate under fundamentalism, talk of catastrophism and of a separation of man from the other primates. These poorly drafted other items do disservice to the creationist position, which could, with more care, have been made free from obvious logical and factual objections. It will be here that, if it is defeated, the day will be lost for the state. In deference to the fundamentalism of its taxpayers, the state may

have tried for too much on their behalf.

In my own experience, exposure to the beliefs of others, very strange beliefs, is never psychologically damaging. Even as a supposedly defenceless child, I never had difficulty in taking beliefs or in leaving them. What a child is really defenceless against are beliefs presented on high authority as facts. This, it seems to me, is what the Civil Liberties Union is demanding American law should do. The ACLU is attempting to force on the unwilling population of Arkansas a situation in which a certain unproven set of evolutionary beliefs must be taught in the schools as fact.

My own recent work has caused me to doubt, not that evolution takes place, but that it takes place according to the usual theory of natural selection operating on randomly generated mutations. What I find is that far too often the facts suggest a reversal of the expected relation of cause to effect, the cart comes too often before the horse.

My concern, therefore, is that what the American Civil Liberties Union is seeking to impose on the state of Arkansas may be scientifically wrong. The intriguing puzzle for outsiders in this case is to decide which side is being the more broadminded. The immediate presumption by many scientists that it is the American Civil Liberties Union is, on deeper thought, by no means obvious.