

Did Darwin Repent on His Death Bed?

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 22 January 2015 10:29

Every so often I receive a short note from those who think Darwin repented on his death bed. Indeed, I received one today. Is it a true story, or, one invented by those zealous for the Lord (in other words, a lie), or a story that can best be called an 'urban legend' (ignorance)?

This article is founded on an excellent investigative piece by [Matt Slick of CARM](#). It is a summary; readers who want to know more should go to the original article by Slick.

The Actual Story (a true account?)

"It was one of those glorious autumn afternoons, that we sometimes enjoy in England, when I was asked to go in and sit with the well-known professor, Charles Darwin. He was almost bedridden for some months before he died. I used to feel when I saw him that his fine presence would make a grand picture for our Royal Academy; but never did I think so more strongly than on this particular occasion.

He was sitting up in bed, wearing a soft embroidered dressing gown, of rather a rich purple shade.

Propped up by pillows, he was gazing out on a far-stretching scene of woods and cornfields, which glowed in the light of one of those marvelous sunsets which are the beauty of Kent and Surrey. His noble forehead and fine features seem to be lit up with pleasure as I entered the room.

He waved his hand toward the window as he pointed out the scene beyond, while in the other hand he held an open Bible, which he was always studying.

"What are you reading now?" I asked as I seated myself beside his bedside. "Hebrews!" he answered - "still Hebrews. 'The Royal Book' I call it. Isn't it grand?"

Then, placing his finger on certain passages, he commented on them.

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I made some allusions to the strong opinions expressed by many persons on the history of the Creation, its grandeur, and then their treatment of the earlier chapters of the Book of Genesis.

He seemed greatly distressed, his fingers twitched nervously, and a look of agony came over his face as he said: "I was a young man with unformed ideas. I threw out queries, suggestions, wondering all the time over everything, and to my astonishment, the ideas took like wildfire. People made a religion of them."

Then he paused, and after a few more sentences on "the holiness of God" and the "grandeur of this book," looking at the Bible which he was holding tenderly all the time, he suddenly said: "I have a summer house in the garden which holds about thirty people. It is over there," pointing through the open window. "I want you very much to speak there. I know you read the Bible in the villages. To-morrow afternoon I should like the servants on the place, some tenants and a few of the neighbours; to gather there. Will you speak to them?"

"What shall I speak about?" I asked.

"Christ Jesus!" he replied in a clear, emphatic voice, adding in a lower tone, "and his salvation. Is not that the best theme? And then I want you to sing some hymns with them. You lead on your small instrument, do you not?" The wonderful look of brightness and animation on his face as he said this I shall never forget, for he added: "If you take the meeting at three o'clock this window will be open, and you will know that I am joining in with the singing."

How I wished I could have made a picture of the fine old man and his beautiful surroundings on that memorable day!"

The above, written by a Lady Hope, was published in the 'Watchman-Examiner', a Baptist journal, on 19th August, 1915. Friends of this Lady hope signed an affidavit (LA Affidavit, MooreJ:79). In the 1940s a Prof Bole repeated the letter, as he had received it from the Lady in the 1920s (Bole letter, Moorej:86), though his account varied slightly in some details. Malcolm Bowden reviewed this matter in 'True Science Agrees with the Bible' (Sovereign Publications, sect. 6.6, pp259-276).

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Atheistic Skulduggery... or Christian Truth?

It is true that some Christians, in an effort to build a defence against atheism, invent stories that suit their claims. But, it is also fact that atheists, keen to protect their ridiculous beliefs, are far more willing to 'do down' Christian claims and simply reject any such claims, making wild accusations or making-up stories.

They said that Lady Hope did not exist, but research has shown that she did indeed exist, and was in the area of Darwin's home on the day/s in question. And, as Slick says, these atheistic critics "have had to retreat step by step" ([Did Darwin become a Christian on his deathbed?](#)).

It was discovered that a Lady Hope DID visit Darwin, as documented. Once this fact was made known, the critics decided to attack what she wrote instead, saying she had 'embroidered' her account (such is the very deep fear atheists have of one of their own recanting of godless beliefs). It is a fact that Darwin himself did not write of any recanting or Christian beliefs (at least no evidence has been found. But, see later notes on this). On the other hand, if these beliefs did not emerge until he was dying, perhaps he did not have strength to write about it anyway.

Lady Hope's circle was Anglican, with Brethren links. She held evangelistic meetings at her home in Downe, about 1881, which coincided with tent-meetings held by a known evangelist (JWC Fegan).

J Moore researched all this and produced a book, 'The Darwin Legend'. He concluded that while it was true that Lady Hope visited Darwin, some of the details in her account are questionable. However, careful research into his book came up with intriguingly different answers. Yet another writer, LR Croft, wrote 'The Life and Death of Charles Darwin', which says the full account is accurate.

Hope Did Visit Darwin

Moore says that Lady Hope must have visited the Darwin house, for she accurately described its internal features and Darwin himself. In her original account Hope says Darwin was laying in bed, but later corrected that, saying he was on a sofa. It has also said that Darwin would not have used such flowery language. But, he used exactly such flowery language in his response to a new book, and in a personal letter dated 1873. It should also be noted that Darwin's servant

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was saved in the Fegan crusade, and chatted with Darwin about salvation.

Hope Told Others

Critics said that the whole thing must be a fabrication, because she did not publish the story until 34 years later. However, it is known that she did speak of it to friends, very soon after the visit. Moore indeed mentions just one such chat, with Sir Robert Anderson, so he might easily have missed many other such chats. The village postman, Nicholls, was also a convert of Fegan, and we have his account of those days. A Mr Fawkes repeated his account in the Bromley & Kentish Times (7th November 1958, p2) after the postman's death – he was 97:

"During one of my [Fawkes] visits to him [Nicholls], he told me that this lady who had been in attendance on Darwin prior to his death had informed him that he requested her to read the New Testament to him and asked her to arrange for the Sunday School children to sing "There is a green hill far away." This was done and Darwin, who was greatly moved said: "How I wish I had not expressed my theory of evolution as I have done."

As CARM says, though the details of this are questioned as referring to Lady Hope, what DOES come out is that the postman had heard of her visit and of Darwin's interest in salvation.

Sir Anderson and Others

Sir Robert Anderson was head of CID at Scotland Yard, and was then investigating the Jack the Ripper murders. He was a close friend of Hope, as he, too, was a Christian. He confirmed, as early as 1907, that what Hope had written was correct.

In 1882 a local preacher spoke of Darwin embracing the truth of the Gospel in his final hours, which he heard about from Emma, Darwin's wife, in her home. As CARM says, this was independent of Hope's account, and the conversation took place in Darwin's own home with his own family. Though it was somehow 'lost', a letter from Robert Edie, FRGS, to the Darwin family soon after his death referred to Darwin being assured of salvation. An Oxford professor says he had a letter from Darwin saying he had become a Christian. He also adds that it was odd because Darwin's son and grandson rejected the idea. The fact that the professor's claim is contradicted only serves to imply strongly that it was true! (Note: I have studied Forensic Linguistics and would love to read their rejection).

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What 'Summer House'?

Darwin's family, the very ones who reject his salvation, said there was no 'summer house', so Hope must have invented it. Yet, 400 yards away, IS a summer house, outside Darwin's garden. Note, however, that Darwin pointed "over there" and not to the garden. It seems to me that critics were trying their very best to use rather lame excuses to dismiss the idea of Darwin's conversion. As CARM says, Hope would have been very foolish to talk about a summer house that did not exist!

Scripture Memorised

At first Darwin studied theology at Cambridge, with the intention of following a clerical career; it was not his father's wish for him, but an acceptable close second in those days. Darwin was struck by the creation accounts of Paley in his 'Natural Theology', so much so that he memorised the arguments! It was his travels on the Beagle that sucked the flame of truth from his mind and heart, and he soon became agnostic. Many suggest he had 'fallen away' from Christ, but, as I have said several times in the past, his life does not support such a view. We must remember that his background was only partially Anglican – in the main he followed the false religion of his mother, who was Unitarian.

Friends of Hope in the USA document that she may have made up to four visits to Darwin. The CARM investigation upholds the idea of more than one visit (see the CARM points, a to h).

It was Darwin who asked Hope to visit him, after he had heard of her holding 'cottage meetings' nearby. At that time she lived just six miles away from Darwin. Even so, some have tried to tarnish her name and efforts.

Finally

I will not draw from the excellent article by Slick any further, for it is filled with good points. I will just suggest that it was in the Darwin family's interests to keep alive Darwin's original theses on natural selection, etc. So, it is quite acceptable to question why they would not admit to a visit by Lady Hope, and they would applaud anything that contradicted her account, or anything that brought down her character. We do not know for sure if this is what happened, but from the way atheists behave, it is not so outlandish as may at first appear.

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Moore admits that Hope visited Darwin! Thus, this implies that the family lied. But, there could also be another conclusion – that Darwin invited Hope when he knew the family would not be at home, knowing their desire to maintain an atheistic stance! (See later note – none of the family lived at the house at that time)

Darwin's daughter said that Hope was never at Darwin's death... but so what? She never claimed to be there at his very last moments! The daughter's vehemence is typical of those who do not actually lie, but twist facts to support their own point of view. It is a fact that the family did not hand over all of Darwin's letters, but carefully vetoed them. As Moore himself said, "With her [Emma's] guidance, the world would know only the 'Darwin' the family chose to reveal" (p24). Something the family could not control was the fact that Darwin supported many Christian projects. Yet, it is not until 1881, just before his death, that we hear of his possible interest in salvation.

When a famed atheist or agnostic turns the tables and comes to faith, it destroys their fervency in any anti-God work they previously produced. I have no problem at all in accepting that the family therefore got rid of any evidence that Darwin showed the remotest interest in Christian things. Slick says, referring to an earlier article, that Darwin had two public faces – one for general atheists and another for local contacts.

Emma Darwin, while rejecting the visit by Hope, was herself sympathetic to the (ecumenical) Christian cause, and seems she was indeed present when Hope visited. Emma did not appear to have a genuine Christian faith, but a superficial one. This is confirmed by something written by the family denigrating genuine Christian evangelising. It is also clear that, as I have hinted, none of the family lived at Darwin's home during the period Hope was visiting him. So, they could not have first-hand knowledge of what went on.

We have shown that it was not in the family's interest for Darwin to suddenly become what his work opposed. It has been shown that the family only gave selected letters to a publisher. In 1881 Darwin was visited by Karl Marx's son-in-law, Aveling, and Buchner, both avidly anti-God. Emma refused to acknowledge THEIR visit also. So, her accounts of who visited are questionable as full records – she refused to document those she did not like!

I agree with Slick, that even if it were proved that Darwin WAS saved in his final days, it would not alter the strident godlessness of modern atheists. They would simply point to the supposed 'evidence' for evolution and say that though Darwin was vital to their cause, his supposed

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salvation was perhaps due to a fever or some physical problem that addled his brain at the last moment. This is what atheists do routinely!

Would such news cause many atheists to be saved? Possibly, they may become agitated, but salvation is of the Lord! If ANY atheists, or ANY persons are saved, it is because they are elect in eternity anyway and MUST be saved at some time in their lifetimes. Thus, Darwin makes not an iota of difference to this process, even if it would be a lovely detail if Darwin *was* saved.

Bear in mind, too, that whilst most evolutionists today are atheists, Darwin did not say he was an atheist, but an agnostic (which is one step away): "In 1879 atheist John Fordyce wrote Darwin asking whether evolution and God were compatible. Darwin replied that it was absurd to doubt whether anyone could ardently believe in God and be an evolutionist, and gave the examples of his friends, Asa Gray and Charles Kingsley. He then stressed he had never been an atheist and was best considered an agnostic." (asa3.org).

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