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Op Ed — Vestiges

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The writer of *Ecclesiastes* had it right. "What has been is what will be," he wrote wearily, "and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun." Recent press reports have been full of steaming articles about intelligent design. **President Bush** spoke out on the matter precipitating another flood of protests and counterclaims. Scientists rose above the fray, we are told, by arguing that intelligent design has no place in Science (I capitalize the word advisedly). Intelligent design is really a matter for history. Or philosophy. Or poetry. But please, no design here, we're scientists.

Soon press reports retired to overused areas of complaint: Dayton, Tennessee, **William Jennings Bryan**, **Clarence Darrow** and the **Scopes** "Monkey Trial." Even to talk about intelligent design was to label yourself a **Mencken** boobosie.

We continue to hear about these matters because more evidence comes to the fore indicating to some that our world is not simply a random mass of events but a putative collection of casuistry. While Science claims to have no stake in the matter but factual purity, we are reminded that science often brings to the facts the philosophy it claims to have derived from them. No, this isn't going to be a polemic. The only point I wish to make at this juncture is to argue that no human — scientists or otherwise — can claim objectivity without ideology. We *all* have an axe to grind. Some of us grind larger ones more enthusiastically, but to make a case that some are dispassionate in a matter fraught with passion is to attempt to make a serious claim for "no fault" divorce.

To underscore that there really is nothing new under the sun a new book comes across my desk just in time. **James Secord's** *Victorian Sensations* is a unique book. It isn't exactly history and it isn't exactly biography. Rather it's more like the biography of a book or rather the history of a book's life. Secord chronicles the life of what today is one rarely known and even more rarely read book: *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*. Indeed, **Secord's** book is subtitled *The Extraordinary Publication, Reception and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*. *Vestiges* was the *Harry Potter* equivalent of its day, as far as publishing sensations go. (It may say more than we want about these very different cultures more than a century apart, one in a fury after nefarious necromancy, the other about curious cosmology, but we'll let that pass for now.)

Almost every public figure of any note — from **Darwin** to **Huxley** weighed in

on the matter of *Vestiges*. Like today, some saw its publication as the work of **Lucifer**, others saw it as a substantiation of *Genesis* and Q.E.D. proof that **God** has created the world. (Odd, isn't it, how often this happens, how two antithetical views can be claimed the intent of one writer?) Published in 1844, *Vestiges* caught Victorian England off guard. Its major point — the Earth 'evolved' from a swamp of gasses to, eventually, man — infuriated many, both those of a scientific bent, and those of a sacred one.

The book had a bit of a mystery surrounding it, as the subtitle indicates. It went through eleven editions with its author either unknown or wrongly supposed. Rumor abounded that it came from the pen of a great scientific mind; canards raged that it was little more than the inkblot of a feeble-minded dropout. Forty years after its publication, many years after its author's death, and as the book appeared into its twelfth edition, did the reading public know that one **Robert Chambers** was its author.

Chambers was a prolific writer. What made *Vestiges* author *persona non grata* with the scientific community had more to do with the book phrenological leanings (head-bumpology, as it were) and its insistence on speciation, or an early explanation of evolution. Unfortunately, the value of **Chambers'** book got lost in the debate, but even **Darwin** said that the public has been well-prepared for his book by **Chambers'** musings (though **Darwin** despised the book). Speciation had prepared the way for evolution, or, according to the scientists of the time, a wrong-headed view about the evolution of man helped prepare the way for a right-minded view of ...the evolution of man. Indeed, had the book not been so roundly criticized, **Darwin's** scribbling might have enjoyed a more welcoming reception much earlier.

What fascinates about **Secord's** book and about the *Vestiges* sensation is how the scientific community went to great lengths to condemn **Chambers'** explanation about creation while concurring with its conclusions. The criticisms are now all familiar to us: it wasn't really science, it was bad science, it wasn't science at all, or it was so remarkably egregious that it had to be dismissed out of hand altogether.

What are we to make of all this? Only that scientists are as heir to fleshy foibles as the rest of us. Intelligent design now roils those within the scientific community. Indeed, as I write these words the

first ID case, as it's called, is going to court. The case occurs because some parents want ID taught alongside evolution, others do not. Will it help us to know that we have been down this road before?

No, because those who are ignorant of history are, after all, doomed to repeat it. The crucible of disagreement over ID is that it spills over into Science when it is not science, or so opponents say. But what happens more often than not is the opposite. Scientists cavil, often loudly and sometimes contemptuously, when Religion finds a scientific voice. Rarely do we hear complaints about the reserve error, when science de-

claims in a religious timbre, but it happens frequently. The bailiwick of science is the "how" of life, the bailiwick of religion (and also philosophy) is its "why." Science sometimes explicitly explains the "why" of life, and often

does so in *sub rosa* fashion. The implication of evolution is that there is no design, or that the need for a designer is unnecessary. When explanations are undertaken in this fashion (without at least a small qualifier) there will be debate. How can science bark about intelligent design being inappropriate in science when it often preaches its own "whys" religion from the pulpit of secular materialism?

Science often desires to influence social philosophies and choices (an area that is reserved for the bailiwick of religion and philosophy) and that leads us, in **William Lowrance's** (*Modern Science and Human Values*, Oxford, 1985) fine phrase to "technical progress as directed tragedy." For a recent example of this, see the stem cell debate. Only science could lead us to a place where sacrificing some for the sake of others is not only a reasonable ethical solution to one of life's inexplicable but unavoidable tragedies, but a much preferred one.

What makes all of this even more remarkable is that we are vouchsafed our education because churchmen desired that men know. University education began as a religious endeavor, and every early east coast university in this country began as a religious one. Interestingly, when religion was in charge, so to say, it did not forbid science. We all tend to cluck our tongues about **Galileo** and forget it was a couple of churchmen who published **Copernicus' De Revolutionibus Orbis**. Now that the shoe is on the other foot, religion gets the boot out the door. Perhaps

continued on page 42

ATG Interviews Jane Burke

General Manager, Serials Solutions

Column Editor: **Cris Ferguson** (Electronic Resources/Serials Librarian, James B. Duke Library, Furman University, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, SC 29613; Phone: 864-294-2713) <cris.ferguson@furman.edu>

Jane Burke, formerly the president of NOTIS and CEO of Endeavor, has returned to the library world, assuming the role of the General Manager of Serials Solutions. I recently had the pleasure of speaking with Jane about her return to all things library, her new position, the future direction of Serials Solutions, and more. — CF

ATG: *Against the Grain* has interviewed you before, in the June 1994 issue. At the time the interview was conducted you were President of NOTIS. Could you briefly outline where your career path has taken you since then?

JB: That interview happened at an interesting time, because in June of 1994 I and a number of other people were terminated by Ameritech. Ameritech had acquired NOTIS and subsequently had acquired Dynix, and in the merging of the two companies in June of 1994 a number of us were made redundant. Immediately, a group of NOTIS staff, including myself, founded Endeavor Information Systems.

ATG: *How long were you with Endeavor?*

JB: I was with Endeavor through early 2003. Endeavor was a wonderful experience. There were a number of us that were involved in the start up, and I had the honor of being the CEO of Endeavor. In April 2000, we made the decision to sell the company to Elsevier, and a number of us were asked to stay on for a time and continue to guide the company. I did that until early 2003.

Op Ed — Vestiges from page 40

when science changed from, as the great Kepler once said, “thinking God’s thought after him” to the more modern view of thinking God’s thoughts for him, fierce debate was vouchsafed. Now science wants no competition whatsoever. Does the scientific lady protest too much? It’s hard to say.

Of course it’s silly to call for some unnatural and severe demarcation between what science can explain and what religion can proffer. Life is not so easily placed into categories, or at least it is not so easily lived in that fashion. Would it not be better to teach both? Isn’t this what we always do in matters of “why”? It does not strike me as possible that science can conduct itself (nor has it so far) without often declaiming, and I believe rightly, upon the why of life. But how can it complain when other ways of knowing “obtrude” to explain the how? Since it appears inevitable that science will inexora-

ATG: *I read in Library Journal that you spent some time working at Barnes and Noble while you were away from the library world. Could you tell us a little bit more about what you did in your two year hiatus?*

JB: I did work at Barnes and Noble, and I enjoyed it very much. It was a very different experience. I had never worked retail, and I was absolutely at the bottom of the ladder. I learned a lot about team work and a lot about popular culture. And I made almost no money.

During 2004, I worked for a number of months doing business development for a company called Cadmus Communications. Cadmus is a company that provides services to journal publishers, everything from digital conversion and XML mark-up, all the way to actual print. They are the leading provider of services to scientific and technical publishers.

ATG: *That sounds like an interesting business. How did they get into that market?*

JB: They were a printer originally and had been printing scientific journals for many years. As all of it has become digital, the nature of their services has changed. I learned a lot about what major industries are doing with technologies. On the library side we look at these technologies and we utilize them. But when you are looking at how major publishers are trying to make sure that they are providing good content, they are using them in heavy duty ways. I really learned a lot about that. I had an opportunity to watch some textbook transformations, which is the notion of taking a textbook and marking it up completely in XML, so that it can

bly continue in this fashion, whenever such whys intrude, competing ones should — really must — be relayed as well. To forbid it would be to forbid a full recitation of disclosure. It would be the equivalent of discussing the Civil War and pointing to only one cause.

It is highly unlikely this will be the outcome of the debate now raging in Pennsylvania. By the time these words reach your eyes the case may have been decided. Given the nature of our lives these days, intelligent design will probably be outlawed if not otherwise forbidden. That strikes me as narrow-minded, as much as was forbidding the teaching of evolution at the early part of the last century. I said earlier that Mencken made fun of what he called the boobosie who feared evolution in the Scopes trial. He poked fun rightly so. But he also said something proponents of the science-only school of thought should recall with a soupcon of disquietude.

He said, in his inimitable Mencken fashion, that intellectuals are the only people who will say a stupid thing ... twice.

be very easily updated and very easily issued on a chapter by chapter basis. The re-use of content was fascinating.

ATG: *What about your new position persuaded you to join Serials Solutions and the ProQuest team?*

JB: I think very highly of ProQuest as an organization. Under the current leadership they are really doing some fascinating and forward-looking things. They are digitizing a lot of content and making it available. They are working hard at making things like 19th century parliamentary content, African-American archives, and a whole variety of scholarly materials available in a digital form.

Serials Solutions, in my opinion, is in the midst of what libraries are trying to deal with. The nature of library collections has changed. It is not in the process of changing; it has already changed, particularly for the academic library. The majority of what they buy today is digital content. Serials Solutions is providing solutions for managing digital collections. If you look at the management of electronic collections, it is an inherently different art than the management of print collections, and Serials Solutions is right in the middle of that.

ATG: *What is your role as the General Manager? Where will you be based?*

JB: I am the person in charge of the Serials Solutions organization, and I am based in Seattle.

ATG: *Your last several positions in the library world were managing integrated library systems. How do you think those experiences will serve you as the General Manager of Serials Solutions? What kinds of new things do you think you will have to work on?*

JB: Working in and with the library market is something that I enjoy very much. There are some similar issues with managing digital content, mostly around making it apparent and easy to find. The thing that is very different is the relationship between digital content and the digital content publisher, which is much closer than in the print environment. For the most part, libraries acquire their print materials through third parties, like jobbers and subscription agents, whereas digital content is mostly acquired directly from the publishers. One of the things that I am learning and liking about Serials Solutions is the fact that we talk directly to the publishers to get the data that we provide back to libraries. You get a much better sense of both sides of that value chain.

ATG: *When I was first introduced to Serials Solutions, the company had fewer than ten employees. How big is the company now?*

JB: We have 51 people today.

ATG: *How do you see Serials Solutions growing?*

continued on page 44