

## Book Reviews

**The Beagle Record:** Selections from the original pictorial records and written accounts, edited by **Richard Darwin Keynes**. Cambridge UP, £30.

What! Another book about the Beagle? Yes, but this one is different. Professor Keynes, with his intimate knowledge of Darwiniana, has contrived to show the voyage in the round, doing justice to the parts played not only by Darwin but also by Captain FitzRoy, a distinguished hydrographer and meteorologist, and other members of the gallant company who shared in the great adventure. Extracts from FitzRoy's less-known *Narrative* (not reprinted since 1839) are balanced with selections from Darwin's frequently republished *Journal* and interlaced with their revealing private letters and passages from Darwin's actual diary. Anything these last may lack in literary elegance is amply made up by freshness and spontaneity. Their immediacy is heightened by copious illustrations, chiefly watercolours by Beagle's official artist, Conrad Martens.

This documentary history is particularly timely as the BBC's splendid television series, *The Voyage of Charles Darwin*, distorted chronology for dramatic purposes by introducing violent clashes over Genesis during the cruise. Darwin's own vivid accounts show him still struggling to understand his exciting discoveries while FitzRoy confesses that he was at that time inclined 'to doubt, if not disbelieve, the inspired History written by Moses'. By extraordinary fortune these two young men, both highly talented, both with strong scientific bents, both tireless in their quest for certainty, set out round the world together. They sometimes quarrelled. Considering their cramped quarters, the hardships and dangers, with FitzRoy suffering from his difficult temper and manic-depressive tendencies and Darwin from unrelenting seasickness and homesickness, the miracle is that after five years they returned with respect and indeed affection for one another. FitzRoy's denunciation of Darwin's heresies came a generation later. The record leaves the impression of a remarkably fine group of men, who together made possible the completion of H.M.S. Beagle's historic voyage, which led to the *Origin of Species* and to what Julian Huxley called 'the greatest of all revolutions in human thought'.

This is a massive and beautifully produced book: hence the price.

G.T. CORLEY SMITH

**Audubon**, by **John Chancellor**. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, £6.95.

He must have been a very nasty man. According to this book he was 'vain and vulgar', an extravagant deceiver (stating 'My own name I have never been permitted to speak', the implication being that he was the French Dauphin), a man often disliked, despised and distrusted, a liar (writing, for example, two entirely different accounts of a return journey), and a person rich in 'vanity, ingratitude and ill-temper'. A thoroughly worthless fellow? Or, as Georges Cuvier phrased it, the creator of 'the most magnificent monument which has yet been raised to ornithology'? Or both?

John James Audubon's paintings are remarkable. The life he led was also remarkable, as he criss-crossed the new United States, shooting determinedly (100 birds a day, on average, and once gunning down 25 brown pelicans to draw a single male), forgetting those who helped him (who has ever heard of William Lizars or Joseph Mason, both crucial to the Audubon plates?) and never forgetting money for an instant. The 1830 price for *The Birds of America* was £168, a sizeable sum, but in the 12 years up to 1838 Audubon spent £28,910 on its publication, and this money had to be recouped. What author today spends that kind of figure on a publication, even when the pound is so relatively meaningless? No wonder the struggling artist has to scrimp, save, lie, deceive and all the rest to make ends meet. No one less determined or selfish could have pulled off this act.