

REVIEW

THE GREAT CHAIN OF HISTORY: William Buckland and the English School of Geology, by Nicolaas A. Rupke. Published by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1983, xii + 322 pp., 14 figs., \$45.00

This volume presents a provocative and intriguing view of nineteenth century geology in England. The author chooses William Buckland as the leader of the "English School of Geology" which he presents as actively opposing and competing with the "Scottish School of Geology." Admitting that no English School of Geology has previously been defined, the author states that "the notion of British Geology does not allow for a historiography which is fine-grained enough to do justice to Buckland and his circle." He follows this statement with a lengthy and frequently tedious attempt to justify and document his thesis. Rupke's reasoning is seriously weakened by his unreserved attacks on the popularity of the writings of Charles Lyell and James Hutton and their influence on contemporary geology. In comparing these with the writings of his "English School" his arguments range from illogical to absurd. In a specific comparison of the popularity of Lyell's *Principles of Geology* with that of Buckland's *Bridgewater Treatise* he suggests that to the "considerable numbers of copies [of the *Bridgewater Treatise*] must be added all the books written by other members of the English school; for example, the *Outlines* by Conybeare and Phillips (1822); de la Beche's *Geological Manual* (1831) and his *Researches in Theoretical Geology* (1834); Phillips's *Guide to Geology* (1834) and his *Treatise on Geology* (1837); even Bakewell's *Introduction to Geology* (1828) and Mantell's *Wonders of Geology* (1838)." Further he states "It did

not go through as many editions as Lyell's *Principles*, but a comparison of the number of editions is valueless unless the print-run and the price of each book are identical."

Historians must remain aware of the spectre of preconceived bias; a skilled historian admits his bias and attempts to minimize its effect in his writings. The iconoclastic approach to history is not recommended as a convincing method of argument. Unfortunately, this book seems to suffer from such disadvantages. The following quoted paragraph may show this:

"The modern perspective of earth history owes little to Scottish geology. Huttonian uniformitarianism was fundamentally uncongenial to historical geology. Its vision of a permanent present made James Hutton object to invertebrate extinction. It also caused Charles Lyell to reject the evidence for the progressive succession of fossils. The common notion that modern geology originated with uniformitarianism is a hindrance to the unencumbered study of the origin of the new geology. The distinctive nature of English geology was in fact accentuated by the conscious manner in which it set itself apart from the Scottish tradition." Strong words these; they are self-explanatory.

There is merit in this volume. There is useful and clear exposition of the work of William Buckland, especially as it related to the bone caves and the diluvial phenomena. Further, the point of view of the author is presented and should be considered by historians of geology. We may gain new insight into the contributions of some of the "English geologists." Provocative views have their place and should not be suppressed.

—H.C.S.