CURRENT LITERATURE.

THE DESCENT OF MAN. By Charles Darwin. New York: D. Appleton and Company.

If it were possible to read these volumes with the same degree of candor which has toned and qualified what the author has written, we should have little concern for whatever errors they may contain. Aside from the question whether the Darwin hypothesis is true or false, the best natural history of modern times is furnished in *The Descent of Man*, and in the two preceding works, which are necessarily linked with the later one, and really constitute one treatise on natural history. If we had never heard or conceived that Darwin was a dangerous propagandist of theories which were designed to shake the faith of Christendom, we should reach this conclusion slowly, if at all, on reading the volumes. As a writer of natural history, no living or dead author has pushed his investigations so far, or brought together so much curious learning. The scientific exposition of the laws of animal life are in some sort a revelation. So long as we have to do with facts, we are on safe ground. These are cautiously set forth with the temper of one who does not hesitate to acknowledge an error in his own statements or deductions, or to admit the full force of a fact, even though it militates against his own theory. When we arrive at the last of Darwin's facts, we have the alternative of attempting to cross the wide and almost bottomless gulf on the farther side of which the Darwinian conclusion is reached, or go back and note the strength of such objections to Darwin's conclusions as St. George Mivart, in *Genesis of Species*, has set forth.

Crossing this Darwinian chasm, it remains only to accept the following conclusions:

"But no one can at present say by what line of descent the three higher and related classes, namely, mammals, birds, and reptiles, were derived from either of the two lower vertebrate classes, namely, amphibious and fishes. In the class of mammals, the steps are not difficult which led from the ancient monotremata to the ancient marsupials; and from these to the early progenitors of the placental mammals. We may thus ascend to the Lemuridæ; and the interval is not wide from these to the Simiadæ. The Simiadæ then branched off into two great stems: the New World and the Old World monkeys; and from the latter, at a remote period, man, the wonder and glory of the universe, proceeded."

Chronologically, evolution has neither beginning nor end. It overturns at once what is accepted as the revealed account of the creation of man, and substitutes in its place a *catarhine* evolution as one of the later developments of animal life in the long pedigree of humanity. Was there a point somewhere in this process of evolution when this mortal monkey became an immortal man, charged henceforth and forever with moral responsibility; and yet has only merged into this condition as a tadpole is merged into a frog?

The evolution theory is also at variance with the most conclusive and satisfactory geological accounts of creation. The record of the rocks, as read and interpreted in this light, is that there have been separate and successive acts of creation—that genera, species, races, have appeared on the earth, and have then become extinct. The monsters did not perpetuate themselves. The next species appearing is not a related one, but wholly distinct. After millions of years, man himself appears as a separate creation, having no relation whatever to any species of animal life which had preceded him. Darwin anticipates this view, only to affirm that geological discoveries have not yet proceeded far enough to demonstrate the truth of the proposition. The very weakness of the answer is an admission of the strength of the converse statement.

It is a significant fact that no very strong antagonisms to the conclusions of this book have yet been disclosed by that art of the

press which is the special exponent of the doctrines of the various religious denominations. The criticism from this quarter is not only weak, but, in many instances, there is much less of dissent than of semi-acquiescence in the views which Darwin has promulgated.

THOUGHTS ABOUT ART. By Philip Hamerton, author of "A Painter's Camp." Boston: Roberts Brothers.

The alliance of literature with art never seems so obscure to us as when an artist commits his thoughts to print. Ruskin and one or two other artists have become masters of a vigorous and graphic style of expression. But the greater number of those who have communicated with the public through the medium of books or pamphlets, constantly remind us that they owe nothing to letters. And yet, as painting is a pictorial language, we should expect from one who is a master in this department, that if he did not become an artist in words, he would at least use our common speech with some degree of grace and facility. We may never tire, for instance, of Turner's pictures; but we tire soon enough of his ignorance of tolerable English, and could wish that the great artist had managed in some way to conceal this ignorance from the public.

It is noteworthy that not in our time has any great artist successfully united the functions of a competent art critic. Ruskin's place is certainly not among famous artists; art in this instance only serving to inform the mind of a bold and incisive critic. Had Ruskin attained the artistic fame of Turner, would he have broken through the stolidity of his countrymen, telling them truths touching their ignorance of art which only one Englishman will tolerate from another? But Ruskin, as the commentator of Turner, beginning where the latter ended, rendered a noble supplementary service to art.

In *Thoughts about Art*, the author addresses himself more particularly to artists; but evidently aims to enlist the interest of that larger public who have some æsthetic culture. He has a blunt, honest way of stating his propositions, and deals candidly with such difficulties as are likely to beset all young artists.

The qualifications of art critics are very well set forth in the following extract:

"True art critics will belong to a separate class, when we shall have enough of them to be called a class. They ought to be especially educated for their office of criticism. They should be practically acquainted with all the ordinary difficulties of art. The commonest tricks of the studio constantly impose on persons who pretend to judge of performance in art without practical apprenticeship. A real critic can scarcely be an accomplished artist, but he must be able to draw delicately, and must have *tried* to color, or he will never know what color means. The most recondite secrets of method must all be as familiar to our critic as his alphabet. He must have drawn from the living figure and dissected the dead. If he presume to criticise landscape, he must have *lived* among the noblest natural landscapes, and there filled his note-books with thousands of memoranda. After long discipline in the life-school, on the mountains, in the forest, by the shores of the great lakes, out on the storm waves, and, *lastly*, in the best galleries of Europe, his opinions concerning painting may come to be worth listening to, but not otherwise."

The author assigns a low rank to photography as an art. He insists that painting does not need the help of photography, and beyond fixing isolated facts to serve as occasional reference, it can not be made an important auxiliary aid to painting.

"Photography can neither color nor compose; therefore color and composition in painting will be felt to be more precious than ever, and the lovers of intellectual art will prize its peculiar attributes yet more highly when they come to perceive the immense distance which these two mighty powers place between it and all photographic imitations of Nature."

But the writer candidly admits, that, as a means of art education, its influence on the public has been salutary. It records simple facts cheaply and well. The details of architecture are faithfully represented; and in exactness of mechanical delineation, extending so far as to supplant miniature portraiture in oil, it certainly has gained a recognized place as an art. The chapter on "Word Painting and Color Painting" is one of the most thoughtful and suggestive in the book. The author classes Tennyson at the head of modern word-painters; but, after citing a dozen other English authors, makes no mention of Hawthorne, whose rank in this respect is superior to that of a number included in this exclusive list. Except Ruskin, no one of late has given to the public a more sug-