

the Dean of Westminster to his father, mother, and brothers.

ERASMUS DARWIN.*

When the history of scientific research in the nineteenth century is written no name will occupy a more prominent position than that of Darwin. In spite of ridicule, contradiction, and contempt, the broad fact remains that by the publication of the celebrated works on "The Origin of Species and Man" vast strides have been made in the march of knowledge, not only by reason of the truth of the main features of the writer's arguments, but also by the very opposition they have met with. Nothing so assists in arriving at a just and proper conclusion in an abstruse question as the controversy raised by its discussion, and it is in no small degree attributable to the loudly expressed condemnation of the Darwinian theories by the thoughtless that they have met with the careful and world-wide consideration of the thoughtful. It is no great condemnation to say that such theories do not and cannot carry upon the face of them absolute proof of their soundness. At any rate they are advanced in such a manner and supported by such evidence as to establish something more than a very strong *prima facie* case in their favour. It is not to be expected, nor is it necessary even if it were possible, that a finite mind should endeavour to assume an equality of knowledge with the infinite in searching after the first cause—the prime mover—in the mysteries of living nature. Professor Darwin may or may not be right in his conclusions, but he has by the depth of his study and the force of his arguments established for himself an exalted place among men of science. It is not unknown among his countrymen that the principles laid down and elaborated by him were held and supported by his grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, in a more crude form; but a wider circle of readers, who perhaps have less time and opportunity for the study of such recondite subjects, may probably learn for the first time that these very questions were discovered more than a hundred years since by a man of powerful mind and profound learning, bearing the same name as the author of the work referred to.

The book under consideration is in two parts; a "preliminary notice" of the life of Erasmus Darwin, written by his grandson Charles, and a translation of the clever criticism and digest of his literary works which recently appeared in *Kennes*, a German scientific journal, written by Dr. Ernst Krause. It will doubtless astonish and interest the reader to follow the arguments advanced in "Zoonomia" and the "Botanic Garden." From these works Dr. Krause has made such extensive extracts that it will be sufficient here to say that a perusal of his able article will give an excellent idea to scientific minds of the opinions and theories of the elder Darwin and the evidence he adduces to uphold them.

The preliminary notice of his life, which by the way occupies nearly two-thirds of the book, is valuable as affording a clear illustration of the character of this remarkable man. Educated at Cambridge and Edinburgh, he followed the profession of a physician, and at an early age his predilections for scientific study were evident. That he was a Theist in the strictest sense of the word some of his letters show. On the occasion of his father's death, writing to Dr. Okes, of Exeter, he thus expressed himself:—

"That there exists a superior *Ens Entium* which formed these wonderful creatures is a mathematical demonstration. That He influences things by a particular providence is not so evident. The probability, according to my notion, is against it, since general laws seem sufficient for that end. Shall we say no particular providence is necessary to roll this planet round the sun, and yet deem it necessary in turning up *cinque* and *quatorze* while shaking a box of dice, or giving each his daily bread? The right of nature affords us not a single argument for a future state; this is the only one that is possible with God, since He who made us out of nothing can surely recreate us; and that He will do this is what we humbly hope. I like the Duke of Buckingham's epitaph—*Pro Regis capite; pro Republica serper; dubius non improbas vixi; incertus, sed interbatus morier. Christianus advenca. Deo confido benevolentis et omnipotentis, Ens Entium miserere mei.*"

As a poet Erasmus Darwin attained a considerable reputation, and especially won the admiration of Horace Walpole, who considered the following lines "the most sublime passage in any author or in any of the few languages with which I am acquainted":—

" 'Let there be light!' proclaimed the Almighty Lord.
Astonished Chaos heard the potent word:—
Through all his realms the kindling ether runs,
And the mass starts into a million suns.
Earths round each sun with quick explosions burst,
And second planets issue from the first;
Band as they journey with projectile force,
In bright ellipses their reluctant course;
Orbs wheel in orbs, round centres centres roll,
And form, self-balanced, one revolving whole.
Onward they move amid their bright ascade,
Space without bound, the Bosom of their God!"

The story of his life is very readable matter, apart from any scientific interest attaching to it, while in its higher aspect it will be eagerly received by those who are already acquainted with his writings. Professor Darwin has given us a book valuable alike to the philosopher and the antiquary, and one which owes not a little of its merit to the excellent translation from the original German text of the latter part of it by Mr. Dallas.

* Erasmus Darwin. By Ernst Krause. Translated from the German by W. S. Dallas. With a Preliminary Notice by Charles Darwin. London: John Murray.