NEW BOOKS.*

Although the name of Erasmus Darwin, the eccentric physician and poet of Lichfield, as modern readers may now be little known either as a bard or a man of science, and his once famous works, "The Botanic Garden" and "Zoonomia," have all but sunk into oblivion, there is much that is curious and much of lasting interest to be found in the sundry records of his life. Born in 1731 and educated at Cambridge, he settled down later in life as the fashionable doctor and social philosopher of his native city, and died at Derby; gradually becoming more and more widely known as an shrewd and close observer of Nature, an eccentric if forceful philosopher, a man of science when scientific men were few, and of daring originality of thought even when his theories were proved to be vague and unscientific. Of such a man his more famous descendant, Mr. Charles Darwin, was well fitted in all respects to become the biographer, and in the pages of his little volume (John Murray) which he has just published, entitled "Erasmus Darwin," Mr. Ernst Krause (translated from the German by W. S. Dallas) he has done good service, which all scientific students of Natural History will fully appreciate. In a short biography of about 160 pages he has managed to give a graphic and interesting picture of the Lichfield Doctor, his works and ways, habits of observation, experiments, and inventions; so that the reader becomes deeply interested in a man who, though now so little known, really deserved well his due place among philanthropists, poets, physicians, and poets. The same indefatigable spirit of research marks the close and the thorough painstaking, and it is evident, as curious to find that there is scarcely a single work of the younger Darwin which may not be paralleled in at least a slight way in the works of his ancestor. Many of the very views which the modern philosopher has elaborated and advocated, such as the theory of heredity, adaptation, the protective arrangements of plants, sexual selection, and the insectiverous plants, and the analysis of the emotions and sociological impulses, are to be found in the writings of the poet and physician a hundred years ago—no doubt with a vide difference in their interpretation of the problems of Nature, but still a system of thought strikingly akin. The many coincidences of the individual experiments are equally striking, him a battery of disparagement. The physicians of that day remarked him with being a philosopher; the philosophers considered him to be fanciful and poetical while poets and literati objected to his position as a physician and to his adoption of science. He has, nevertheless, outlived the partiality and prejudice of such critics; and it has been the pleasant task of his own illustrious descendant to rescue him from a name not true and to establish us to estimate the value of his work. It is a task for which he has done this will find many readers.

The old battle between Protection and Free Trade would seem to be hardly yet over, though every year and then there crops up, in the shape of a speech, pamphlet, or essay, some reminder that it still exists. Mr. G. Rudler Ford, M.A., &c., in his volume entitled "Protection and Free Trade" (Longmans and Co.), has briefly sketched "Protection" as an unmitigated evil: "It has been (he says) ever more concerned to foster the interests of few to whom it has become rich, yet is a nullities of that type which, if most given, becomes a necessity, and builds classes which prosper on it, and which 'abolitionism,' which can only end in disaster and death. Free Trade England the cry has now been heard, but it is a cry which only with a generation that have forgotten the days and dangers in which the movement was emerged when Protection was finally laid low." The natural outcome of a policy of Protection is set forth by Mr. Rudler Ford in the following words: "Protection is ever to the interests of persons already wealthy existence; citing by way of example the case of the German States, where, the production of corn being dear, the rich landowners were the protection alike of its export and import, and continued to prosper while the alternately favourable and unfavourable to the farmer, who was, however, unable to profit by the enjoyment of the same privilege. The result of the community being for the time once established, the rest of his hard-earned harvest consumed useless in the same manner as the rich of new States to harvests already superabundant. Hence agriculture becomes unprofitable, fields lie fallow, and the deserted corn-growers take to the towns' ale. The result is the peasantry impoverished, the empire in debt." From this short extract that Mr. Rudler-Ford writes with clearness and vigour; and though he may be accused of a little partiality for Free Trade, his argument throughout is conducted with logical fairness and good sense. He devotes himself to showing three main propositions, the nature and effects of Protection; the true dangers of international aggressions, their effective and non-effective remedies, and the applicability of Free Trade; and thirdly, how far England of to-day may be taken as an example of the truths laid down. Whether, at starting, students of political economy are inclined to agree or to disagree with the views of these writers, they will hardly fail to allow that he is a well-read and able author, who has brought together a large amount of information on the subject, and all but hackly problem, and does his best to solve it on a logical basis. Many useful facts and figures are to be found in close books of the kind.

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* "Erasmus Darwin." By Ernst Krause. (John Murray.)