

MR DARWIN'S NEW BOOK.*

Everyone has observed the tiny, curly, worm-like heaps of earth which cover the ground in many parts, and everyone has doubtless a vague idea that they are somehow caused by worms. Few, however, we believe, have any clear notion as to how the worms produce these casts, and fewer still dream of the momentous part played by worms and their casts in modifying the surface of our earth. To shed light on this subject Mr. Darwin has written his latest book—a book which is really the result of something like half-a-century's investigation. "The share which worms have taken in the formation of the layer of vegetable mould which covers the whole surface of the land in every moderately-humid country is the subject of the present volume." The subject certainly seems at first a most unpromising one. Worms have hitherto been regarded almost universally as mere consumers of the ground, as loathsome pests, whose sole use is to bait a hook. A study of Mr. Darwin's book will change all this, and lead the reader to doubt with the author "whether there are many other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the world as have these lowly organized creatures." What, then, is the wonderful work they do? If a paved or stony path is left for any time unattended, not only does it get overgrown with grass, but it seems actually to sink in the ground. Every farmer knows that if lime or manure is spread over the ground, or if stones are placed on the surface and left undisturbed, in course of time they disappear below the surface. This the farmer attributes to a natural tendency of things to sink. Even large stones, like those that have fallen at Stonehenge, sink in process of years more or less beneath the earth; and entire ruined buildings and even towns like the old Roman towns of Silchester and Uriconium, have, in the lapse of centuries become buried under several feet of earth. This, no doubt, is partly due to wind-drifts down, and to earth washed down the slope of the ground by rain, but mainly, as Mr. Darwin shows in his interesting book, to the ceaseless excavation of myriads of worms. These humble creatures are constantly burrowing their burrows. They eat their way under the ground, casting up the earth above-ground, and this accounts for the many worm-like casts seen on all undisturbed places where any earth is to be found. When nothing else, moreover, is to be had, the worms feed on the earth itself, extracting what nourishment they can therefrom, and throw the refuse out on the surface. The whole earth beneath our feet, from a depth varying from an inch or two to four and even more feet, is riddled with their holes. It is calculated, on a very low average, that there are something like 30,000 worms in every acre of land. These are continually boring their holes and throwing up the earth, with the general result, it is calculated, of adding to the surface earth brought from beneath and passed through their bodies equal all over to one-fifth of an innumerable, and weighing several tons to the acre. So that, in the course of five years, a fresh layer of earth, one inch in depth, is spread over the surface wherever worms can find shelter, and that is nearly everywhere where there is sufficient moisture. This has been going on for untold ages. Mr. Darwin's book almost entirely consists of instances upon instances of the work thus performed by worms in all parts of the world. Experiments he has been making for many years in his own house and grounds, friends have made experiments and observations in various localities for him, and he has sought and obtained information from all quarters. Other investigators besides himself have been working at the subject in recent years, and the result is a mass of evidence that is irresistible. Certainly some of the examples he adduces of the stupendous results achieved by these tiny creatures, such as the entombment of ruined buildings and cities, seem at first incredible enough, but so surrounds us with evidence that we are shut up to only one conclusion. "When we behold a wide, turf-covered expanse, we should remember that its smoothness is mainly due to all the inequalities having been slowly levelled by worms. It is a marvellous reflection that the whole of the superficial mould over any such expanse has passed, and will again pass, every few years through the bodies of worms." We have said that Mr. Darwin's work is the result of 30 years' investigation. To show how cautiously and patiently he goes to work, we may mention that something like 40 years ago he had a field of his own covered over with chalk for the purpose of observing the result; he waited about 20 years for this, and when the ground was trenched the chalk was found in a uniform layer many inches below the surface, with abundant evidence that the result was the work of the worms. Well, may we call these hitherto despised and rejected creatures nature's ploughmen. Probably more than any other natural agency have they been the means of fertilizing the earth. Not only, as we have seen, do they completely renew the soil in the course of a few years, and fertilize it by passing it through their bodies, but they drag down from the surface tons of leaves, and refuse of all kinds, partly to be used as food and partly to line their burrows. For these they contract with great care and ingenuity, lining them sometimes with finely triturated soft and smooth earth, and sometimes even with a mosaic of fragments of leaves; all serving as a natural measure. Even the very soil itself, which should be called animal, rather than vegetable mould, often owes its existence to their persevering labours. Mr. Darwin shows that they have the power of penetrating and interlacing rocks of wonderful hardness; and this process continued for thousands of years must have produced results of stupendous magnitude. Some people, however, seem incapable of forming a conception of how such apparently inadequate causes can produce such results, looking as they do only at the present and the individual. "Here," Mr. Darwin remarks, "we have an instance of that inability to sum up the effects of a continually recurrent cause which has often retarded the progress of science, as formerly in the case of geology, and more recently in that of the principle of evolution. And speaking of geology, he shows that worms must have played an inconsiderable part in the process of denudation that is continually going on all over the surface. Their action on the ground and even on rocks, in loosening the surface and throwing up casts, places it in a condition favourable to be acted on by wind and rain, and thus they become an important agent in geology. And so he piles instance on instance to prove that these lowly creatures, without sight or hearing, and with the simplest and apparently feeblest organization—these almighty creeping things, that are looked upon as the type of all that is profligate and despotic and useless—are after all the benefactors of humanity. Mr. Darwin has already done more than any single man to enable us to see nature, in a true light; he has introduced into science a principle of unsurpassed fertility; he has altered the whole course and tendency of modern thought; but we venture to think that his marvellous genius for observation has achieved no greater triumph than in the work embodied in his latest book. Not only has he elevated the lowliest of creeping things to a lofty place in the economy of nature, not he shows that even they work, with some degree of intelligence, and know how to adapt means to ends. The book is one which any child may read with interest, and provides matter for serious thought to all, scientific and unscientific. Like all Mr. Darwin's books, it marks a new departure in science.

* The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action of Worms, with Observations on their Habits. By Charles Darwin, F.R.S. With Illustrations. London: John Murray. 1881.

LIBERAL DEMONSTRATION IN PAISLEY.

SPEECHES BY LORD REAY,
MR ANDERSON, AND MR W. HOLMS.

The Paisley Liberal Club, which was recently established, and has now attained a membership of about 700, held its inaugural meeting in the Good Templar Hall last night. For half an hour before the commencement of the proceedings a band of young men amused themselves and the audience by a selection of songs, which, being altered to suit existing circumstances, and sang to popular air, passed the time of waiting pleasantly away. By the hour of meeting the hall was filled in every corner, the front seat of the gallery being reserved for ladies. Sir Peter Coats, the honorary president of the club, presided, and Lord Reay was accompanied to the platform by Mr George Anderson, M.P.; Mr Wm. Helms, M.P.; Mr Alex. Crum, M.P.; Mr D. Head, advocate, Edinburgh; Mr Alex. Cross, Glasgow; Provost MacLean, Mr J. Miller, president of the club; Mr Thomas Coats of Ferguslie; Mr Stewart Clark of Kilmodan; Rev. Dr Jas. Brown, Mr Jas. Finlayson of Merchant; ex-Baillie Barr, Glasgow, &c.

The CHAIRMAN, who was loudly cheered, said—Ladies and Gentlemen, I am glad to be able to invite to-night the ladies on this occasion. (Cheers.) As introductory to the business of our meeting here to-night, I feel I should say a passing word in allusion to the Junior Club of Paisley. (Cheers.) The burgh of Paisley has been long-known for its unmistakable adherence to Liberal principles—I may say Liberal in the extreme—and always true to their colour and bold and unfaltering in their defence. (Cheers.) Last winter Paisley, following the example of all the principal towns in Scotland, started what is called the Paisley Parliamentary Debating Association, on the model of Glasgow and Edinburgh. They soon began to find the want of a club and a place of rendezvous. When a successful session had finished at the end of March, 1881, it seemed the time had come for trying to institute a Liberal Club, according to the spirit of the times. The matter was ventilated, and it was resolved to proceed, and by active exertions within and liberal assistance from without (cheers)—they have formed a club-house, well furnished in every way and well suited for the purpose intended. (Cheers.) I beg to congratulate the young men of Paisley on the fact, which the establishment and success of this club makes evident, that an epidemic of Conservatism which some years ago seemed to attack the rising generation—(laughter)—to much the same way as measles, chicken-pox—(renewed laughter)—and other infantile diseases, has passed away, and that now we feel ourselves breathing a healthy and invigorating atmosphere in which young men yield to those sympathies with freedom and progress which are natural in the morning of life. (Cheers.) Our young friends, the members of the Junior Liberal Club, are well aware that a rival club, called the Paisley Free-trade Club—(cheering)—was established a year or two ago, and has made considerable progress in the保護ist line of politics. (Laughter.) It becomes the Junior Liberal Club, therefore, to use their best efforts to combat, and to counteract any influence they may have brought to bear on the Liberal constituency of Paisley. (Cheers.) In other places, by dint of long-continued and patient work, it has been discovered that the day of trial came that Liberal stranglehold had been undermined. I do not fear this here, yet over-confidence is always perilous, and in all circumstances the best security our strength could have is to remain and thoroughly-organized band of young Liberals, well instructed in the principles of their party, and strong in the strength which comes through union. Of the parochial advantages of union near our neighbours in Glasgow at last general election can speak in the most laudatory terms. (Cheers.) This great triumph on that occasion to the cause of liberal and enlightened opinions can never be forgotten by them. (Cheers.) We may well strive to draw a veil from the book of our opponents on that vital question—union. As regards the burgh of Paisley, and also the important constituency of Paisley, we are very comfortable at present. We have got the keys of both in our pockets!—(laughter)—and we mean to keep them there. So long as we have such able and excellent representatives as my good and esteemed Liberal friend Mr. Crum—(cheers)—is the one and Mr. Wm. Holmes in the other—(cheers)—we feel we have no dread of opposition on the part of our Conservative friends for a long time to come. (Cheers.) At the late election they kindly endorsed our just claim to the position by avowing a contest in both county and burgh—for which trust we all feel truly grateful. (Laughter and cheers.) As I have already stated, however, we must not be too confident or suppose that things will last as far as ever. We must never forget that

He who fights and runs away

Will live to fight another day.

(Cheers.) Ladies and gentlemen, it would be very judicious on my part to extend my remarks beyond the short period that I have already occupied. Allow me to state that letters of apology have been received from the Earl of Elgin; Donald Currie, M.P.; the Hon. Arthur Elliot, M.P.; Mr Buchanan, M.P.; Mr Crum Ewing; Mr Barbour, of Leamington; Mr James Morton, Greenock; &c. I now introduce Lord Reay to the meeting. (Cheers.)

Lord REAY said—I am told that it is your wish that I should touch on my address on what is happening abroad. Let us begin by noticing what, in foreign affairs are the tendencies and disturbing influences. The tendency of armaments to increase, and to make these armaments as effective as possible, does not seem to lessen any of its attractions. The disturbing influence of an unsound financial condition affects most countries, with the exception of France, which is certainly prosperous, though distinguished economists think that there is a very speculative element in French prosperity. The people undoubtedly are frugal, and, though they talk much, undoubtedly work hard with the view, not of living more comfortably, but of becoming proprietors in some form or other. Germany wants to grapple with Socialism, wants to be rich, and tries its hand at repression and Protection. Adventurous proposals are introduced into bills. The State, as a general dispenser of comforts, is engaged in dangerous experiments of railway management, of insurance. When Protection is not yielding the expected results, immediately increase of Protection is clamoured for; when emigration is increasing in the eastern provinces, which are already less populous than the others, a demand is made, not to stop the causes of emigration, but to command these people to build a wall round your own Protection, colonies, and a Royal Navy together with it, and to secure all the disadvantages of prosperous manufacture and a great trade. It is forgotten that the United States of America have Protection and manufactures, and export a great deal which Germany wants, though they have no colonies, and hardly a navy. It would be worth while to ascertain what percentage of the 60,000 Germans who, since 1875, have emigrated to the United States German superiors to the Brazilian population—have they remained a distinct, an improving feature among their new compatriots, or have they been absorbed, retaining only a German dialect as a tradition for their children, as the case in Pennsylvania, and as was the case in Alsace and Lorraine? The German intellect has not lost any of its vigour or its depth; but in practical politics at this moment it seems to have lost its hold. Parliamentary institutions are not making way, and some of the best politicians get tired of the existing imbroglio, and cease to develop their talents for it. The finances of Austria are not better than those of Germany, and here again we find the army the chief consideration. But Parliamentary institutions in Austria and in Hungary are in better condition than they are in Germany. The chief pre-occupation of Austria is, of course, watchful pre-occupation in the south-east of Europe, and the magnet of Austria is undoubtedly pointing in that direction, with the necessary result that the more Slavons it becomes the more difficult will be to resist the separatistic tendencies in, which are

not to be made too clear that all hope of getting thing like popular government firmly established on the Continent must be abandoned as Socialism and Nihilism give an or a pretext, or a legitimate ground, holding with an iron hand, those who struggle manfully for a better state of things. The elements of a people, the working class, I term I include all who think and work with brains or with their hands, turn round, fomenters of disorder, and require of the authorities to crush them. In the process, Liberty inevitably goes to the wall. Liberty after all means toleration of all opinions, of order. You cannot have the one without the other. There is no need to insist on the assembly of Scotsmen except by way of re-enforcing. The fact that our working classes are a constant source of envy to foreign men. The fact that our working classes are inclined to get their own adjusted by a political means is the chief safeguard against evils which we see abroad. As long as there is a platform on which nobodies can be disengaged calmly, from which nobodies who trust to argument and not to force, long we need not be afraid. And it is then that Russia and other countries will from convulsions which sap the roots of the Empire. Repression of Nihilism, unbalanced by overgrown expenditure, huge armaments, violent means of education, inadequate educational establishments—these are the faults of Russia, not to mention Protection as a corollary of such a state of things. Italy presents a much more cheerful picture. The ability to be found in the Italian Parliament is very great. Masini and Morelli are indeed among the ablest statesmen of the present. Italy is drawn into the vortex of events, and is carrying out fortifications on the French frontier, which are not exactly a confidence in peace, but nothing could be more pestiferous than a disturbance of the relations between Italy, France, and other. We have too many interests in common, all these too anxious to give to our people thing more substantial than vainglory not to understand about Mediterranean politics. There is an Italian saying—occasione mai arriverà per l'Italia di andare a war with the whole world, but never with England. The importance to the world that we distract ourselves in the Mediterranean, all the states are concerned, except those which are to be discarded. One has got to stand by the side of the great difficulties is twofold—let us make France and Italy thoroughly aware cannot allow any Power to become supreme in a condition at all times to command the Mediterranean, and to hold the Hebrides in a condition of all times to command the Mediterranean, and to oversee all hostile forces for the latter consideration, because I believe the fact of such superiority being firmly established would prevent any international alliance. No foreign statesman of the first either France or Italy would ever be going to war with England on this or any question; but there is a serious risk of a French statesman blundering into adventure, would rouse the susceptibility of the nation, unless they were deterred from such by the knowledge that it would be visited heads in a most effectual manner. A small English fleet in the Mediterranean is a constant element in the peace of the world, and on certain conditions of avoiding complications, a policy there is no encouragement on the independence of others, and a powerful I believe, an absolute necessity to our vitality; and it is not easy to overrate the importance of our Admiralty when we know going on in foreign dockyards. That the Royal equal care on their naval power as on their army cannot be denied. That determined to strengthen their North position cannot be doubted. 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