

7. Darwin

Durrant's Press Cuttings,

ST. ANDREW'S HOUSE,
HOLBORN CIRCUS, LONDON, E.C.

(LATE ST. HOLBORN VIADUCT.)

Athenæum,

Bream's Buildings, Chancery Lane, E.C.

(Published by John C. Francis.)

Cutting from issue dated March 21 1887

SCIENCE

More Letters of Charles Darwin: a Record of His Work in a Series of Hitherto Unpublished Letters. Edited by F. Darwin and A. C. Seward. 2 vols. (Murray.)

We may congratulate ourselves that Darwin's correspondents treasured and kept his letters, for the volumes before us contain material as interesting and as valuable as that found in Mr. F. Darwin's life of his father published in 1887.

As the object of these volumes is not biographical, the editors have very wisely arranged the letters under various heads—evolution, geographical distribution, geology, botany, vivisection, and miscellaneous. The correspondence adds to our wonder at the wide range of knowledge and of interest possessed by the writer—but of that enough was said on a previous occasion. One particular advantage that we hope to find from the present publication is that the perusal of these letters will induce younger naturalists to make a study of what Darwin himself wrote, rather than the views of later writers about him. "Darwiniana" of all sorts are persistently read; the original is far too rarely studied. At any rate, the disciple of Darwin has here further opportunities of studying the working and understanding the meaning of the master's mind.

In these, as in the previously published letters, the reader will frequently have cause to admire the character of Darwin. He wrote to Mr. A. R. Wallace:—

"I am surprised at my own stupidity, but I have long recognized how much clearer and deeper your insight into matters is than mine."

He saw in 1878 the imperial future of our race, for, writing on the artificial checking of population, he said:—

"Suppose that such checks had been in action during the last two or three centuries, or even for a shorter time, in Britain, what a difference it would have made in the world, when we consider America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa! No words can exaggerate the importance, in my opinion, of our colonization for the future history of the world."

His wish that borings should be made in Pacific atolls has been fulfilled, and the editors think that the verdict is entirely in Darwin's favour. But it is needless for us to multiply quotations, as these letters will be widely read. How Darwin's friends felt for him, even when they doubted the validity of his views, may be judged from a letter to him from Adam Sedgwick:—

"I only speak honest truth when I say I was overhauling with joy when I saw you, and saw you in the midst of a dear family party, and solaced at every turn by the loving care of a dear wife and daughters. How different from my position—that of a very old man, living in cheerless solitude. May God help and cheer you all with the comfort of hopeful hearts—you and your wife, and your sons and daughters."

The editors tell us that they have not discovered "to what prize" a letter to Sir W. Bowman refers; they may take it that it is the "Actonian Prize" in the gift of the Royal Institution, of which Sir William was in 1878 the honorary secretary. In the next edition the late Prof. Westwood should be spoken of as the "Hope Professor of Zoology," not "Entomology."

The volumes are adorned by fourteen photographs, which are of great interest; and in many cases short biographical notices of Darwin's correspondents add to the interest and value of the book. Its best praise is that it is worthy to stand by the three biographical volumes which we already owe to Mr. F. Darwin.