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LITERATURE.

THE BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"More Letters of Charles Darwin," Edited by Francis Darwin and A. C. Seward. Published by John Murray. 2 vols.

All that was left unpublished of Darwin's correspondence after the appearance of the "Life and Letters" in 1887 is contained in these volumes, and it seems to me a little. Not in character is it unimportant. So much will be apparent when it is stated that among his principal correspondents were Sir J. D. Hooker, Herbert Spencer, Sir Charles Lyell, Professors Huxley, Owen, Wallace, Asa Gray, and Francis Galton. Darwin, in spite of his close absorption in the various branches of study to which he applied his intellect, was a prolific letter-writer, a circumstance to be explained by his avoidance of society and preference for a country to a town life. The letters, dealing as they do with evolution, geographical distribution, botany, &c., are of the profoundest interest to the scientific reader, and they contain a good deal that will repay the attention of the layman also. Darwin's bent of mind was naturally religious. His love of truth was proverbial. But his theological position was undefined. There was no creed to which he could subscribe, and a letter written only four months before his death to Lyell on the subject of a future life stamps him, with Spencer, Huxley, and others, as an agnostic pure and simple. He says—

With respect to the great subject to which you refer, I always try to banish it from my mind as ineluctable. Many persons seem to make themselves quite easy about immortality and the existence of a personal God by intuition; and I suppose that I must differ from such persons, for I do not feel any innate conviction on any such points.

The old Lamarckian theory of variation under the control of personal guidance, which is still favored in many quarters, meets with no approval from Darwin, who writes to Lyell—

Why should you or I speak of variation as having been ordained and guided, more than does an astronomer, in discussing the fall of a meteoric stone? You say you have him say that its fall at some particular place and time was "ordained and guided without doubt by an intelligent cause on a preconceived and definite plan." My theology is a simple matter; I cannot look at the universe as the result of blind chance, yet I can see no evidence of benefited design, or, indeed, of design of any kind, in the details. The whole question seems to me ineluctable, for I cannot put much of my faith in the so-called intuitions of the human mind, which have been developed, as I cannot doubt, from such a mind as animals possess; and what would their convictions or intuitions be worth?

As everyone knows, the evolutionary hypothesis was independently formulated by Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, and among the most interesting letters in the series are some which passed between the two. Writing to Wallace on the eve of the publication in 1859 of "The Origin of Species by Natural Selection," Darwin says:—

I know from correspondents that your explanation of your law (distributed) is the same as that I offer. You are right that I came to the conclusion that selection was the principle of change from the study of domesticated productions; and then, reading Malthus, I saw at once how to apply this principle. Geographical distribution of geological relations of extinct to recent in the islands of South America first led me to the subject, especially the case of the Galapagos Islands. I forget whether I told you

some "quite demoniacal" about his foe, and though he means "to try and get more anglic in my feelings," he adds that he will never forget "Owen's cordial shake of the hand when he was writing as spitefully as he possibly could against me." Mrs. Carlyle's deploration that "Owen's sweetness reminded her of sugar of lead" rejoined his son; "capital!" he called it. Owen was taken to task by Huxley in a review, which elicits from Darwin the following praise:—

I have just been reading your review of the "Vestiges," and the way you handle a great professor is really exquisite and inimitable. I don't know when I have read a review which interested me so much. By heavens! how the blood must have gushed into the capillaries when a certain great man (whom, with all his faults, I cannot help liking) read it!

Another antagonist was Bishop Wilberforce, who, under Owen's inspiration, attacked the "Origin of Species" in the Quarterly Review in 1860. Darwin writes to Huxley—

The Quarterly is unaccountably clever, and I chuckled much at the way my grandfather and self are quizzed. I could have and there see Owen's hand. By the way, how come it that you were not attacked? Does Owen begin to find it more prudent to leave you alone? I would give five shillings to know what tremendous blunder the bishop made, for I see that a page has been cancelled, and a new page grafted in.

It was in the same year that Huxley and Wilberforce had their famous encounter. The occasion was a meeting of the British Association at Oxford. Wilberforce attacked Darwin—at first playfully, then in grim earnest. Turning to Huxley he said, "I should like to ask Professor Huxley, who is sitting by me, and is about to tear me to pieces when I have sat down, as to his belief in being descended from an ape. Is it on his grandfather's or his grandmother's side that the ape ancestry comes in?" Huxley's reply was incisive and powerful. After demonstrating the bishop's incompetence, through ignorance of science, to enter on the discussion at all, he said—

You say that development drives out the Creator. But you assert that God made you; and yet you know that you yourself were originally a little piece of matter no bigger than the end of his good pencil case. As to my descent from a monkey, I should feel it was no shame to have risen from such an origin. But I should feel it a shame to have sprung from one who prostituted the gifts of culture and of eloquence to the service of prejudice and of falsehood.

The speech, which silenced Wilberforce, caused a tremendous sensation, and it is only to Huxley's own summary of it, Darwin writes:—

I must send you a line to say what a good fellow you are to send me so many accounts of the Oxford doings. I have read it twice and lent it to my wife, and when I get it home I shall read it again; it has so much interested me. But how dare you attack a live bishop in that fashion? I am quite ashamed of you! Have you no reverence for the lawn sleeves? By Jove! you seem to have done it well. If anyone were to ridicule any belief of the bishop's, would he not blantly shrug his shoulders and be inexpressibly shocked?

Huxley was Darwin's loyal and consistent champion throughout the latter's life. "My good and admirable agent," the great naturalist called him, "for the promulgation of my damnable heresy," and Darwin showed his gratitude in many ways, notably in organizing a subscription to enable Huxley to recruit his health when it broke down, and by a legacy of £1,000 "as a slight memorial of my lifelong affection and respect for him." Writing to Wallace in 1859, Darwin thus refers to Sir Joseph Hooker (who is still alive) and others:—

I forget whether I told you that Hooker

you refer me to one or two books (for my power of reading is not great) which would illumine me? Or can you explain in one or two sentences how I am? In one of his letters Darwin has something to say on spiritualism. Referring to Mr. (now Sir) William Crookes's "Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism," he writes:—

I cannot disbelieve Mr. Crookes's statements, nor can I believe in his result. It has removed some of my difficulty that the supposed power is not an anomaly, but is common in a lesser degree to various persons. It is also a consolatory to reflect that eagerly arise at any distance, in some wholly unknown manner, and so may serve for. Nothing is so difficult to deceive as when to draw a just line between scepticism and credulity. It was a very long time before a scientific man would believe in the fall of acornules, and this was chiefly owing to so much bad evidence, as in the present case, being mixed up with the good.

On the subject of science in general, Darwin administers a corrective to the too practical spirit, which demands utilitarian and far every effort. His friend Henslow had said in a lecture—"However delightful any scientific pursuit may be, yet, if it should be wholly unapplied, it is of no more use than building castles in the air." Darwin demurs, saying:—

Would not your laurels infer from this that the practical use of such scientific discovery ought to be immediate and obvious to make it worthy of admiration? What a beautiful instance chloroform is of a discovery made quite purely scientific researches, afterward coming almost by chance into practical use! For myself I would, however, take higher ground, for I believe there exists, and I feel within me, an instinct for truth, or knowledge or discovery, of something of the same nature as the instinct of virtue, and that our having such an instinct is reason enough for scientific researches without any practical results ever ensuing from them.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED.

- The Fall Mall Magazine Extra, "Pictures of 1860; from Messrs. E. A. Thompson & Co.
- "A Banger Quota," by Douglas Blackburn (Messrs. William Blackwood & Soc. London).
- "Our Promised France," some thoughts on the insurance; selected and arranged by Rev. T. T. Fungate (Messrs. Wells, Gardner, Darton, & Co., London).
- "The Law of Churchmanship and Sédimens in the Twentieth Century," by Philip Vernon Smith, LL.B. (Messrs. Wells, Gardner, Darton & Co., London).
- "The Character of the Sefai," by the Ven. F. de W. Lambington, M.A. (Messrs. Wells, Gardner, Darton & Co., London).
- Magazine
- "The New Idea," 3rd June.