

For

J. Darwin

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More Letters of Charles Darwin. Edited by Francis Darwin and A. C. Seward. Two vols., illustrated. John Murray, 32s. net.

It is now sixteen years ago that the *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin* made its appearance. The "more letters," numbering nearly 800, which are contained in the present work, were for various reasons omitted from the previous collection. From this unused material the editors of *More Letters* have compiled an almost complete record of Darwin's work, adopting the plan of classifying them according to subject, under such heads as Crinipedes, Man, Natural Selection, and following the chronological order in each group. Mr. Darwin's letters to Sir Joseph Hooker especially, as also those to Sir Charles Lyell, F. Müller, Huxley, and A. E. Wallace, being written with entire freedom as to intimacies, are especially interesting and important, as giving the reader an insight into the writer's personal character. From them the impression is formed of a singularly warm-hearted and lovable man, incapable of spite, patient under criticism, inflexibly just, and desiring only that the truth should be revealed, whether by himself or by some other seeker. The letters are a marvellous record of a laborious life spent in research in many departments of knowledge. Darwin would be at the same time compiling facts in Biology, Botany, Geology, and would pass from his studies in the origin of species to his observations of the earth-worm, and from thence to the phenomena of the glacial period of the earth's history, and all this with the ease of a master-mind. Of the noise and fury of the controversy that was aroused by the startling statement of the Evolution theory, only the dimmest echo is heard in the present volumes. All the hard things that were said of Darwin were powerless to disturb the serenity and the sweetness of his temper. He was no truculent disputant, but a steady seeker after truth. His personal attitude to religion it is impossible to discover from the Letters. As regards his scientific attitude to religion very little is revealed. He could not detect in the phenomena of nature the existence of design, though he would not affirm that it was impossible. Indeed he wrote, "If we consider the whole universe, the mind refuses to look at it as the outcome of chance—that is, without design or purpose. The whole question seems to me indissoluble." Accordingly he wrote elsewhere, "I am not sure whether it would not be wiser for scientific men quite to ignore the subject of religion." With characteristic modesty he deprecated such a statement as that "my views explain the universe." "It is," he said, "a most monstrous exaggeration. The more one thinks, the more one feels the hopeless immensity of man's ignorance." Such a confession on the part of so profound a student of the natural world makes asperity impossible in discussing the relations of religion and science. The discovery of the truth is the all-important thing, not the discomfiture of an opponent.