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MORE LETTERS OF CHARLES DARWIN.*

Those who have read (and what naturalist has not?) the Life of Charles Darwin published by his son in 1887, must have been deeply impressed by the interest and suggestiveness of the letters which are therein contained. It was known that these constituted only a small part of the immense correspondence which he carried on with men of all sorts and conditions, and there has been a widely felt desire that a larger number of these documents should be given to the public. The editors of these volumes have laid all those interested in natural science under a deep obligation by satisfying this desire and giving us a second instalment of Darwin's letters.

* * * More Letters of Charles Darwin." Edited by Francis Darwin and A. C. Sewall. 2 volumes. 3s. net. (John Murray.)

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The pleasure and profit of reading these letters is enhanced by the method of classification, according to subjects, which is adopted; all those in each group being arranged in chronological order. The editors have also added short foot-notes, which set forth tersely the facts which the reader wants to know about each of Darwin's correspondents, and explanatory of the various subjects alluded to in the letters. To gather and edit these details must have been a task involving no small labour. Another merit of the book is its full and comprehensive index.

The letters have a considerable objective value. It was Darwin's endeavour to gather from the best authorities, at first hand, all the knowledge which could be obtained concerning the many subjects upon

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which he wrote, and to ascertain that the data upon which he founded his generalizations were absolutely trustworthy. To this end he applied to those upon whose knowledge and judgment he could rely for specific answers to specific queries. As may be imagined, the amount of varied information contained in the letters is simply amazing.

But their subjective interest is far deeper than this. They give us an insight into the mind and character of the writer which helps us to understand his life and work. We have here before us the constructive mind patiently accumulating the great store of facts from which the unifying theories were to be deduced. He is ever on the watch for new material bearing on the great questions that he is endeavouring to answer, and his mind is alert to receive suggestions and information from all quarters. We can see something of the prodigious labour by which the theories, with which his name is imperishably associated, were built up. They were no hastily conceived or superficially speculative hypotheses; each stage in their construction was tested and viewed from many standpoints before the next course was raised upon it. It was a slow process this gathering of facts, and we can see as the work progresses with what care and critical skill their correlations and implications were determined before they were used in the construction.

Darwin's letters were not written for effect, or with a view to publication. They have the spontaneity of the earnest mind whose single aim is the discovery of the truth. There is little of the spirit of egoism except that they show that he believed he had a message for his age, and that he entertained that confidence in the truth of his theories which every honest worker must feel when he is sure that his conclusions are the logical outcome of the facts at his command.

The letters may be divided into two categories. Some were written to comparative strangers. These are carefully composed, more or less formal, but always clear. The majority were written to intimate friends, and these are written in an easy colloquial, graphic style, full of bright humour, and showing a sympathetic appreciation of all really honest work. He submits his tentative conclusions to their criticism, and in