

Literature.

MR. DARWIN'S NEW BOOK.\*

THE opinion which we form of Mr. Darwin's new book must depend entirely on the principles by which we judge it. If we are to regard it simply as a contribution to natural history the value is very great. It is a repository of new and curious facts, the collection of which must have required an extraordinary amount of diligence; and whatever doubt there may be as to the conclusions abstract from them, there can be none as to the extreme accuracy of the observations which are thus recorded, and which are grouped together in such a manner as to make them mutually instructive. Mr. Darwin has wandered through all the varieties of animal life in quest of information which might throw some light on his own special theory, and it is only fair to him to say that he has given us a careful and complete statement of the result of his inquiries, omitting nothing because it appeared to militate against his own views. The book, therefore, is not a mere piece of special pleading, but a large induction of facts, which may or may not be explained in the way that the author proposes them, some of which may not admit of solution at all, but which are here for the student to examine and judge for himself. This mode of conducting controversy is undeniably as rare and at the same time as valuable, that we are loath to give the credit to the writer who has adopted it, and to commend his example to those who are engaged in discussions of this character. There are not a few questions whose satisfactory settlement might be hastened if they were examined in this scientific style, established these looked at by themselves and in their entirety, and the conclusions to which they had frankly accepted. Theological and political discussions have much to learn from such a book as this. No doubt the phenomena of the physical world are of a more palpable character than those with which they have to deal; but what we complain of in many controversies is that each party not only intentionally ignores everything that does not accord with their own views, but they continually allow themselves to be imposed upon by mere claims; that they mistake words for things. Their views, theories, are unexamined, and their meanings misapprehended. Mr. Darwin shows them how a true scientific inquiry, even when his preliminary investigations, perhaps even his preliminary investigations, induce him to the adoption of a particular theory, proceeds to test it; what pains he takes in the collection of evidence; how carefully he seeks to assign to every item of it its own proper value and its own; how anxious he is to take into account any fact that tells in a contrary direction; how evident it is throughout that he never ceases for any momentary victory, and that what he has to do is not to establish a favorite principle, but to discover and exhibit truth.

We say this entirely irrespective of the truth of Mr. Darwin's opinions. We value the book as furnishing an admirable specimen of the mode of scientific investigation, but we do not, therefore, repose confidence in it as a scientific guide. Taking it as it stands, we do not feel that its facts contain the conclusion which the author seeks upon them. To many we have no doubt that the book will be disappointing. They have been expecting some new and remarkable results upon revelation which would create a fresh excitement in theological circles, probably afford ground for exhortation and triumph among the ranks of orthodox. Twofold, as we think, many champions of Christianity have treated the Darwinian theory as an unnecessary antagonism to revelation, and have dismissed it as theological rather than as purely scientific grounds. Of course, therefore, on the opposite side there has been a corresponding eagerness in its defence. There are a certain class of thinkers who would gladly accept any theory as to the origin of man, however transmitting it might be, if only it served to throw some discredit on the Bible, and are anxious, therefore, to find Mr. Darwin's opinions true. We think, however, that even they will conclude that this book does not really advance the argument. It is one thing to collect facts; it is another thing to show that there is a connection between them and the position they are adduced to establish, and it is just here that our author appears to be in fail. Of course, the greater the number of facts, the more improbable is it that

they are accidental coincidences, the stronger the proof of the existence of a general law by which they are all governed. But the question returns, What is this general law? and on this the book, we submit, throws little light. The resemblance between different members of the animal world, and especially those between man and other mammals, are striking enough; but the point to be proved is that these are due to a process of development in the way supposed by Mr. Darwin. The analogies are there; but it is so certain that the only way of accounting for them is by assuming the descent of all the members of a class "from a common progenitor, together with their subsequent adaptation to diversified conditions." It is easy to describe an opposing theory by a passing remark that "it is no scientific explanation to assert that they have all been formed on the same ideal plan," but this will hardly be accepted as conclusive by those who, even admitting the remarkable evidence that appears to lead continuously to the idea of development, see also the difficulties by which it is surrounded. The view of the subject, could not have been stated with more pliancy, exhaustiveness, and candour than it is here put by Mr. Darwin; and if he fails to convince our minds of the truth of an hypothesis advanced with such remarkable power, it is because his references to a good deal further than the facts justify. We are far from saying that his conclusions are unconvincing, and we agree with him that "he who first demonstrates them is bound to show why it is more irrefragable to explain the origin of man as a distinct species by descent from some lower form, through the laws of variation and natural selection, than to explain the facts of the individual through the laws of arbitrary creation." All that we say is, before the view by which Mr. Darwin contends is admitted among the admitted conditions of science, it stands to be decided by arguments that approach with more to demonstration than those we had here.

The book really consists of two parts—the first, although treating of the same subject, is the shorter, and contains the evidence bearing directly on the "descent of man," while the second sets forth at great length the author's view of one of the modes in which the changes in the lower of animal life have been effected. Arguably, it is a defect that the latter, which forms only a subordinate argument, should receive so much attention, and occupy so much space, as almost to thrust into the background the subject to which the book is primarily devoted. It is extremely interesting, so much, to review the evidence by which Mr. Darwin seeks to show that the differentiation of species is due not simply to the process of natural selection—that is, to the pre-eminence of those forms which gave their possessors special advantages in the struggle for existence—but also to "arbitrary selection," that which depends upon the superior attractions which individual males possess for the females, and the tendency to the multiplication of the thus possessing them. But still, after he has developed the whole ground of that he has done in to show that there is another mode existing in its account the establishment of arbitrary selection by the female sex. In his on this which is perhaps, it is important, but as the only, treated the general principle that man is "the modified descendant of some pre-existing form," it is a matter of considerable importance to decide what modifications are they to "arbitrary," and what to "arbitrary selection," but we do not think the details have given us as to the pre-eminence of different classes of animals, the rivalry between the males for the favour of those of the opposite sex, and the peculiar qualities of colour, voice, or structure which the victor has developed, form only a curious and instructive page in natural history. Facts as numerous, and some of them as remarkable, must have their significance. Whether Mr. Darwin has laid hold of it is a point we do not prefer ourselves qualified to decide. All that we want say in passing is that they are far from being as convincing in their character as so clear in their indications as to justify any strong and decided statement.

We want never to re-examination of the main problem of Mr. Darwin's undeniably great book, for another opportunity. We would like, however, in the interests of justice and religion alike, there will be no attempt in any of the discussions it most provide for us. On the above hypothesis, it is a question of science to be decided simply by an appeal, and no loyal servant of the truth will fear the issue of such appeal. Could every point for which our author contends be established, we

\* The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Man. By Charles Darwin, F.R.S., F.L.S., &c. London: John Murray.

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need not fear the consequences. The power of the Creator is not less manifest nor the wisdom which pervades the economy of the universe is not less marvellous if we believe that the present state of things has been brought about by the slow operations of laws. Still, it would be absurd to deny that the adoption of Mr. Darwin's views would materially affect many of our opinions on subjects of the highest importance; but even this should not be allowed to bias our judgment of their truth. We must say, however, that because we can see his theory "understand how it has come to pass that man and all other vertebrate animals have been constructed on the same

general model, why they are brought to such very diverse developments, and why they retain certain resemblances to man," we do not see why we should be called on "frankly to admit their commonness of descent," still less why we should be told that "it is only our natural prejudice and that aversion which made our forefathers believe that they were descended from some gods, which leads us to dissent to this conclusion." We are surely warranted to object to this summary mode of treatment when, on our author's own admission, "Of the other and lowermost class in natural science, many are still opposed to evolution in every form."