

J. Darwin

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## MOSE LETTERS OF CHARLES DARWIN.

In the interval of sixteen years which has elapsed since the publication of the *Life and Letters of Darwin*, a number of additional letters have been received from various correspondents; and these with a supplementary budget not included in the *Life*, make up a couple of stout volumes published to-day by Mr. John Murray, price 25s. the two volumes. These letters, taken by themselves, without reference to the previous instalment, supply a full and fascinating record of Darwin's life's work. In order, however, to make clear various points which arise in the correspondence, and for the sake of continuity, the editors have republished extracts from the *Life and Letters*. In addition to this there are voluminous annotations, so that the reader will not find himself constantly plagued by allusions to names and occurrences which either have to be passed by unnoted or compel constant reference to other books. Many of the letters are naturally of a highly technical character, but the average unscientific man who knows nothing of the *Cirripedia* will, generally speaking, find in them a vast storehouse of information, and further indication of the remarkable zeal and intellectual vigour of the great scientist. From a purely literary point of view they are not remarkable. Darwin, as his editors explain in a preface, usually reserved the end of the day for letter writing, and he was very often careless and slipshod in the matter of style and punctuation. As we know, he admired Huxley's free and easy style immensely, and was a keen critic of any pretensions or overloaded scientific writings. But it would not be fair to judge him even as a letter writer by the majority of the letters reproduced in these volumes. They are, as a rule, in the nature of intimate discussions with fellow scientists on technical matters, or hastily scribbled records of scientific research. But they never fail to throw light on the amazing industry and devotion of the man.

One of the most interesting features of the first volume is an autobiographical fragment which came to light during the removal of Darwin's books from his country house at Down, and is here published for the first time. This document illustrates to what degree in the case of a great genius the child is father of the man. Darwin was fond of collecting and botanizing when eight or nine years of age.

I remember I took great delight at school in taking the stones in the quarry pool. I had then formed a strong taste for collecting, chiefly pebbles, fossils, etc., but also shells and minerals—one which was given me by some boy decided this taste. I believe shortly after this, or before, I had mastered in botany, and certainly when at Mr. Case's School I was very fond of parting, and invented some great falsehoods about being able to colour crosses as I liked. At this time I felt very strong friendship for some boys. It was soon after I began collecting stones, i.e., when I was 12, that I distinctly recollect the desire I had of being able to know something about every pebble in front of the hall door—it was my earliest and only geological acquisition at that time.

"I was born a naturalist," he adds a sentence or two later. Darwin was twenty-nine years of age when he jotted down these juvenile impressions; yet he remembers that when a child of ten and a half he was "very passionate" and "swore like a trooper"; and thought a demand for taunted bread and butter made by a soldier to one of their men the quaintest and wildest speech he had ever heard. This singular scrap of autobiography comes to an end with a laud reference to a riding tour taken at the age of eleven years, and does not cover more than five pages. It reveals the interest which Darwin took in his own development, and how it been continued would have constituted a blood of unique value. In the first volume will be found a single letter written by Darwin to his father from Edinburgh University, and after this—a boyish account of his interest—a reprint of the extensive correspondence he had with Henslow during his five years' absence on a scientific cruise in the *Beagle*. Two years after his return home he became engaged to his cousin, Miss Emma Wedgwood. In a letter to this lady shortly after the announcement of the engagement he expresses the hope that his future wife will "humanize me and soon teach me there is greater happiness than babbling theories and accumulating facts in silence and solitude." Darwin's home life was clearly happy, but in reference to the point as to whether domestic bliss ought to be regarded as superior to the keen joy of scientific research, we remember that he wrote to Professor Asa Gray, of New York, one of his great admirers, "Children are one's greatest happiness, but often and often a still greater misery. A man of science ought to have none—perhaps not a wife: for then there would be nothing in this wide world worth caring for, and a man might (whether he would or not) be another question) walk away like a Trojan."

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to produce the grey, or vice versa, one of the great admirers, "Children are one's greatest happiness, but often and often a still greater misery. A man of science ought to have none—perhaps not a wife; for then there would be nothing in this wide world worth caring for, and a man might (whether he could in another question) work away like a Trojan."

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Would not your letters infer from this that the practical use of each scientific discovery ought to be immediate and obvious to make it worthy of admiration? What a beautiful instance chloroform is of a discovery made from purely scientific researches, afterwards 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 coming from them. You will wonder what makes me run on so but I have been working very hard for the last eighteen months on the anatomy, etc., of the *Cirripedia* (on which I shall publish a monograph), and some of my friends laugh at me, and I fear the study of the *Cirripedia* will ever remain "wholly unappreciated," and yet I feel that such study is better than castle-building.

The story of Darwin's association with Dr. Alfred Russell Wallace and the unbroken friendship which existed between them is well known. There are further evidences in these letters of the great admiration which Darwin had for his fellow-worker in the same field. Dr. Wallace was the first to treat the evolution of man in any detail from the point of view of natural selection, and Darwin, after reading his paper with the greatest interest, wrote:—

I feel sure that such papers will do more for the spreading of our views on the modification of species than any separate treatise on the simple subject itself. It is really admirable; but you ought not in the *Mus* paper to speak of the theory as mine; it is just as much yours as mine. One correspondent has already noticed to me your "high-minded" conduct on this head.

Among the letters are several from Dr. Wallace to Darwin and in one of these, alluding to this question, the former takes the view that the credit must rest with the author of "The Origin of Species":—

As to the theory of Natural Selection itself, I shall always maintain to be actually yours and yours only. You had worked it out in detail I had never thought of, years before I had a ray of light on the subject, and my paper would never have convinced anybody, or been noticed as more than an ingenious speculation, whereas your book has revolutionized the study of Natural History, and carried away captive the best men of the present age. All the credit I claim is the having been the means of inducing you to write and publish at once.

The letters given under the heading of "Evolution" occupy three parts of the first of these two volumes. It was in 1842 that Darwin wrote the first sketch of his theory, and it was greatly amplified in 1844; so that at the date of the first batch of these letters he had a working hypothesis of evolution and was engaged on it. This, however, did not by any means exhaust his labours. He had his work on the *Cirripedia*, to which constant allusion is made. Lord Avebury tells a story of one of Darwin's children who is said to have asked in regard to a neighbour, "Then where does he do his harnesses," as though not merely his father, but all other men must be occupied on that group. Here and there one gets a stray flash of humour in the good-natured observations which Darwin makes regarding some of his critics. Thus

in a letter to Sir Charles Lyell, alluding to a remark by Herschel respecting the "Origin" that the higher law of Providential Arrangement should always be stated:—

But astronomers do not state that God directs the course of each comet and planet. The view that each variation has been providentially arranged seems to me to make Natural Selection merely superfluous, and indeed takes the whole case of the appearance of new species out of the range of science. But what makes me most object to Ant Gray's view is the study of the extreme variability of domestic animals. He who does not suppose that such variation in the pigeon was providentially caused, by accumulating which variations, man made a Pouter, cannot, I think, logically argue that the tail of the woodpecker was formed by variations providentially ordained. It seems to me that variations in the domestic and wild conditions are due to unknown causes, and are without purpose, and is so far accidental; and that they become purposeful only when they are selected by man for his pleasure, or by what we call Natural Selection is the struggle for life, and under changing conditions. I do not wish to say that God did not form everything which would mean, but here comes very nearly the same sort of wretched analogy as between freewill and pre-ordained necessity. I doubt whether I have made what I think clear, but certainly Ant Gray's notion of the source of variation having been led like a stream of water by gravity, seems to me to crush the whole subject. It reminds me of a Spaniard whom I told I was trying to make out how the Cordillera was formed, and he answered me that it was quads, for "God made them." It may be said that God foreknew how they would be made.

And again, "Will you honestly tell me (and I should be really much obliged) whether you believe that the shape of my nose (cheek) was ordained and guided by an intelligent cause?" Throughout these letters will be found allusions to the interest created on the Continent by Darwin's theory, and occasionally replies to distinguished savants who had written him or sent him copies of publications containing their views. See *Correspondence*, pp. 175-180, 181-182.

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And again, "Will you honestly tell me (and I should be really much obliged) whether you believe that the shape of my nose (oh!) was obtained and guided by an intelligent cause?" Throughout these letters will be found allusions to the interest created on the Continent by Darwin's theory, and occasionally replies to distinguished savants who had written him or sent him copies of publications containing their views. Leo Lesquereux, an American botanist, at first attacked the "Origin's" view, but afterwards declared that repeated reading of the book had made him a convert. "But how funny men's minds are," adds Darwin. "He says he is chiefly converted because my books make the birth of Christ, redemption by grace, etc., plain to him." These is printed in the first volume a letter written by Darwin to Mr. John Morley respecting the latter's review of "The Descent of Man" in "The Pall Mall Gazette":—

You say that my phraseology on beauty is "less scientifically, and philosophically most misleading." This is not at all improbable, as it is almost a lifetime since I attended to the philosophy of æsthetics, and did not then think that I should ever make use of my conclusions. Can you rely me to any one or two books for my power of reading is not great which would "dazzle me" or can you explain in one or two sentences how I err? Perhaps it would be best for me to explain what I mean by the sense of beauty in its lowest stage of development, and which can only apply to animals. When an intense colour, or two lines in harmony, or a recurrent and symmetrical figure pleases the eye, or a single sweet note pleases the ear, I call this a sense of beauty; and with this meaning I have spoken (though I now see in not a sufficiently guarded manner) of a taste for the beautiful being the same in mankind (for all savages admire bits of bright cloth, beads, plumes, etc.) and in the lower animals. If the blue and yellow plumage of a warbler pleases the eye of this bird, I should say that it had a sense of beauty, although its taste was bad according to our standard.

We have not space to give more than a brief outline of the contents of Volume II., in which the letters deal among other subjects with descent of man, sexual selection, expression, geology, and vivisection. In one place there is a comparison between the intellect of a child and that of a monkey:—

At a house where we have been staying there were Mr A. and Lady Hobhouse, not long ago returned from India, and she said he kept [a] young monkey, and told me some curious particulars. One was that her monkey was very fond of looking through her spectacles at objects, and moved the glass nearer and farther so as to vary the focus. This struck me, as Frank's son, nearly two years old (and we think much of his intellect) is very fond of looking through my pocket lens, and I have quite in vain endeavoured to teach him not to put the glass close down on the object, but he always will do so. Therefore I conclude that a child under two years is inferior in intellect to a monkey.

The illustrations include an excellent likeness of Darwin, taken in 1881, and now used as a frontispiece to Volume II. The editors have also prefixed the letters by a brief outline of Darwin's life, based on his diary.