

REVIEWS.

THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES BY MEANS OF NATURAL SELECTION; OR, THE PRESERVATION OF FAVOURED RACES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE. By Charles Darwin, M.A., Fellow of the Royal, Geological, Linnean, &c., Societies, &c., &c. Fifth Edition. Murray.—This is in every respect an extraordinary book. The sensation its publication has already caused is immense, and is not likely speedily to die out. It requires no ordinary courage to start novel theories, even in the present day—that of nineteenth century enlightenment. There is so much narrow-mindedness still prevalent, so much desire to move on in the old-fashioned groove, so great an inclination to brand everything new as heretical, that an author must count the cost ere he plunges into that sea of controversy, which surrounds any system that purposes to supplant old and established lines of thought. The proper method of receiving novelties, however, is carefully to test and analyse them—not to denounce them as preposterous, because they are unusual. There may be error in them; but even where error prevails, some truth may be eliminated; and it is the part of prejudice and ignorance to fly off at a tangent, and vent abuse, instead of giving careful consideration to statements and reasoning. We make these observations inasmuch as the old and—we would almost say, the disgraceful—habit has been very largely resorted to respecting Mr. Darwin's extraordinary book. By some, with whom "ignorance is bliss," it has been classed offhand as belonging to the character of the celebrated "Vestiges of the Creation," and, therefore, as a matter of course, as a focus of infidelity and perversion. By others, it is denounced as wrong in theory and false in facts. By some it is, however, accepted as a remarkable specimen of mental power, and full of subject for deep thought and earnest investigation. We do not hesitate to confess that we prefer to be found amongst the latter, than in either of the classes of objectors. We meet with much that is startling in Mr. Darwin's exposition of his sentiments, much to which we cannot accord our assent, much that we think is taken too far for granted, rather than proved; nevertheless, we do not, on that account, condemn his efforts, nor pronounce them to be disadvantageous to the character of religion and truth. In many treatises, said to be of the most infidel tendency, a deep undercurrent of real religion may be traced; and even if it were not so, we trust that we should be the last amongst the race of critics, who would deem such a work to that modern *Liber Expurgatorius*, which in many respects is not one whit more liberal than that sink of iniquity into which everything of thought, history, or intelligence is thrust by the illiberal priesthood of Rome. Heresy is a bug-bear into which all classes, who submit their minds to the direction of priestcraft, are ready enough to be frightened; but truth can never suffer by examination, nay, is continually benefited by such a process, for "it is great and prevails" now, just as when the old Latin author wrote that abiding axiom. With the small space that we have at our disposal it is utterly impossible that we can go into a detailed criticism of a work of the great pretensions, to which Mr. Darwin's "Origin of Species" belongs. We can only speak of its general bearing and tendency. That he is altogether right upon his theory of natural selection, we are not convinced, although the proofs he adduces, and the arguments he offers, are many and clever. Still, he is not totally in error, as any person acquainted with the brooding of cattle, or of birds, must admit without doubt or controversy. The fault we find with Mr. Darwin is, that he appears to generalise too much, and to particularise too little. He spends a large amount of time and space in reiterating his theories, without taking them to pieces, so as in the end to lay before his readers a perfect whole. When, however, he publishes the larger volume of his researches, which he promises, and to which this treatise is intended to act as a kind of pilot-balloon, he may probably avoid this defect, and enter so fully into the different particulars of his investigation, as to show that he is consistent, if not altogether right, in his conclusions. We look forward for the appearance of that volume with anxiety and interest: for we have seen enough to respect in that before us, and an assurance of earnest purpose in a new and somewhat dangerous line of thought, which is perfectly cheering, when compared with the multitude of commonplace, which are designated as clever and gifted in the present age. One thing certainly Mr. Darwin has done—he has set men thinking, if they have read his book, and that is no mean result now-a-days. The book has sold by thousands of copies. We hope it has been as diffusively read and pondered on, which, however doubtful it may be—because too many readers, like sheep through a gap, run one way, because a learned man or two tell them they should do so—must induce comparison and examination in the works of nature, and tend in the end to exhibit more largely and conclusively the wisdom and the perfection of the mighty and everlasting works of the great Creator.

ABRIDGMENT DE L'HISTOIRE DE FRANCE. From the Earliest Times to the Year 1890. Compiled Expressly for the Use of Schools and Students Graduating for Competitive Examinations. By Leon Contausseau. Longmans.—The name of the author of this Abridgment of French History is a sufficient guarantee for its excellence. The high position M. Contausseau holds as Professor of the French language at the Royal Indian Military College, at Addiscombe, and