

Edinburgh, January 21, 1862.

SIR,—Your correspondent "Scalpel" has shown a very narrow spirit in his letter to you of the 18th, on Professor Huxley's opinions, and Mr Darwin's speculations on the origin of species. I need not say that Darwin's theory is mis-stated by the writer, as any one who has studied his book with a mind that has not already prejudged it must see how completely the flippant style of your correspondent fails to indicate the true opinions of the naturalist. "Scalpel" says, "a few plants and some poor pigeons, dogs, and other tame beasts may be made to vary their shape a little, and, therefore, dogs may be converted into sheep, mice into cats." This appears to be given us as a condensed view of Mr Darwin's theory, only laid down in a clearer manner from having passed through the brain of so sensible a man as "Scalpel." Compare such dishonest misrepresentation with the grand principles laid down by the philosopher himself as the basis of his theory—principles that have never yet been seriously denied, and, yet, which are seldom kept in view in discussing its merits. These are—variation, inheritance, and the struggle for life. An animal produces offspring differing in some slight degree from the parents. If the peculiarity is of any value to the animal, it necessarily gains some advantage over its parents, and the law of inheritance provides for the continuance of that advantage in its descendants. From the rapidity with which all animals increase in numbers, each is brought into direct competition with each for food and the other necessities of its being. The only possible result is that the individual possessing most advantages, however minute these may be, triumphs over the weaker neighbour, and multiplies at its expense. Its advantages are inherited by its descendants, and after a time the variety is firmly established. In the course of time, some unknown cause in the organisation of an individual causes another divergence of character, and the same process is repeated, and so on till species through infinitely minute shades of difference gradually produce varieties. These varieties become more and more removed from the parent species till at length we have a new one. Now, all naturalists agree that each of these great laws is at work in the world. All agree that there are varieties, that varieties are lineal descendants from species; but here the agreement ends. The Darwinian, carrying out his principles, says that varieties go on producing varieties till the difference becomes specific. The believer in the fixity of species affirms that varieties up to a certain point of resemblance (or divergence) are produced by natural means, but beyond that no powers in nature are able to carry them. There they remain fixed. And when a new species is required, God, by a direct exertion of creative power, brings it into existence. When pressed for his reasons for an assertion so illogical and so void of all evidence, he takes refuge in religion, and begins to declaim on the danger to revealed truth of holding that species can be produced by laws of nature; for is not man an animal, and, as such, subservient to the same laws, and having a common origin with all other created things? When men have gone the length of believing such sophistries, it is said moral responsibility and religious duties vanish like a dream, for are we not all the slaves of "beautiful necessity?" As if the consciousness of heavenly aspirations were not proof sufficient that man's is a different sphere of duties from that of the brutes. Yet such a method of reasoning has its side of truth also, for it reminds us that as there are unvarying laws in the physical world, so there are unchanging ones in the moral and spiritual; that if man attempts to act discordantly to these, the results are in the one case death natural, in the other death spiritual.

"Scalpel" talks of Professor Huxley in a manner that is quite consistent with the general tone of ridicule and prejudice pervading his letter. Professor Huxley is rapidly attaining, if he has not already attained, a position at the head of our scientific men. His reputation, too, is founded, not upon any theories, but upon valuable positive achievements in science. Nay, so well established is his character as a naturalist, that he can afford to brave the buffoonery of such men as "Scalpel," and the inherent prejudices existing in man's mind against theories that appear to place his superiority on a more questionable basis.

Your correspondent says—"Mr Huxley's argument, if argument it can be called, is, that there being a greater bodily difference between the lower and the higher apes than between the latter and man, therefore the body of man has probably sprung from the apes, wherever his mind may have come from." This is rather too strongly expressed to be quite a correct statement of Mr Huxley's argument. The naturalist rather endeavours to lessen, in our minds, in a perfectly justifiable way, the striking difference between man and even the highest apes. To do this, he calls away our attention from the contrast—which, when viewed alone, is apt to be magnified in our eyes—and brings before us another contrast, equally or even more striking. The four manlike apes are by all naturalists united in the same order with the lower quadrupeds; but the anatomical structure and habits of the latter are in as great contrast to those of the former as these are to those of man in his lowest forms. Therefore, naturalists are not unbiassed when they reiterate so positively the impassable gap that separates man from the anthropoid apes. Their virulent assertion is even suspicious, and seems to imply a doubt of the grounds on which their dogma rests. Such resemblances and contrasts, of course, do not amount to proofs, but may surely be allowed to make the probabilities more evenly balanced.—I am, &c.

AMOR SCIENTIA.

THE LATE GROCERS.

See also there seems to be a great demonstration on