

**RECORD:** Anon. 1882. [Review of] The formation of vegetable mould, through the action of worms. *The Daily Chronicle* (Knoxville) (17 February), p.1.

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**NOTE:** See F1357.

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There is no knowing what petty subject the modern scientist may not take up for his study or how much he will make of it when once he applies careful research to it. One would think that when Charles Darwin got down to earthworms he must be about out of material or else in need of bait for some fishing expedition, and yet once applying himself to an investigation of the habits of worms, he makes some most remarkable revelations.

Indeed, it is not merely worms that he studies but the waste from their bodies, and it is subject for no little wonder when one sees through his eyes. It is estimated that there are about 53,767 worms to an average acre of land. These creatures, whether they eat or swallow dirt for the purpose of making their way through the ground, are all the time throwing out of their bodies the waste material just at the surface of the earth, and this is sufficient to cover the ground and gradually to bury the natural surface. Worms actually cover the earth with about .22 of an inch of material in each year!

This Mr. Darwin proves by an immense number of instances. For example, in December, 1842, broken chalk was spread upon a lot near his place.

In November, 1871, a trench was dug through the lot and the chalk pieces were found seven inches below the surface. In those twenty-nine years the worms had buried these things to that extent. In one instance, by measuring their deposit over a small area, it was calculated that worms (and they are active only half the year) put about eighteen tons upon each acre of surface. They are, indeed, working vast changes all the time. They undermine stones and even help to bury cities. They keep the earth's surface in activity and slowly and surely shift its particles and pile up the mould over the more resistant substances.

Looking at them in this light they are at once invested with a lively interest, and their habits are worth hearing about. Worms, he says, live months in water, but die in a day in dry air. They are night creatures, and if shut up in the dark all the time, where there is no sunlight at all, they automatically come to the surface at night and go down by day. They can feel light on the forward part of their bodies, if it is a strong light, but they have no sight. Neither can they hear anything. They lie very near the surface of the ground to keep warm in summer and for the same reason go down sixty inches or more in winter.

They manage always to keep the top of the hole covered. They are so deaf that some that he was domesticating could not even hear his piano, which suggests a certain curious picture in scientific research of the eminent Mr. Darwin playing to an unappreciative audience of worms in his own parlor. The worm can smell some things. It can find an onion, or a cabbage, no matter where you bury it; tobacco it cannot perceive.

This Mr. Darwin asserts; and the intelligence of the worm needs no higher tribute, for man himself cannot half the time tell the difference between cabbage and tobacco. Having thus exalted the creature to this point it may be as good a time as any to drop it. But Mr. Darwin has filled a book with the strange things that worms do and are.

- Hartford Courant.