
DARWIN'S JOURNAL OF THE VOYAGE OF THE BEAGLE.

A new edition of this book, in which, more than half a century ago, the great naturalist of our times described his observations during nearly five years, beginning with 1832, in a voyage round the globe specially designed for the survey of Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego, the western shores of South America, and some islands of the Pacific, has been published by Mr. John Murray, with numerous illustrations. These engravings, drawn by Mr. R. T. Pritchett, who has visited most of the places delineated, and whose name is well known in connection with the voyages of the Sunbeam and the Wanderer, are of good artistic quality, and are truthful representations of the scenes and figures that they put before the reader. Mr. Darwin was, from his youth, so accurate and precise an observer of nature, and reported so perfectly all that he saw, as to give a permanent value to every description he wrote; and the changes which have since occurred in most of the lands touched by H.M.S. Beagle are rather of their social, colonial, and commercial conditions than such as could supersede the matters of which he wrote. Moreover, the ascendancy which his philosophical ideas have gained over all intelligent minds in this age, with the universal recognition of his eminent genius and character, has given an abiding interest also to the earlier part of his scientific work, for in no case have vast intellectual labours, continued through a long life, been more consistently applied to subjects belonging to consecutive or convergent trains of inquiring thought. This book is still needful, therefore, to a comprehension of Darwin's entire process of investigation and the foundation of his doctrines, as well as to a biographical study of his career.

It will be remembered by many readers that when the Beagle, a ten-gun brig, employed in the Admiralty surveying service, commanded by Captain Fitzroy, R.N., sailed at the end of December 1831, Mr. Darwin, then fresh from the University of Cambridge, went as an unpaid volunteer officer of the expedition to do the work of naturalist, an appointment for which he was recommended by Professor Henslow. In perusing his narrative at the present day, we are struck by the extremely different general notions and impressions of travellers at that time viewing the shores of such countries as Australia and New Zealand, which have since become intimately familiar to us by their colonisation and settlement. Mr. Darwin and his companions thought New Zealand a very unattractive and unpleasant country, and could not see how Australia was to become a great country. There was a not distant limit, he supposed, to the occupation of tending and shearing sheep for the export of wool, and the only other valuable product was whale-oil. New South Wales was then an unhappy abode of convicts, and the other Australian colonies did not exist, while in New Zealand there were only a few missionaries and depraved whalers: he would not advise English families to emigrate to any of those lands. But he admired the grand inland cliffs of the Blue Mountains, between Sydney and Bathurst, and he saw that curious animal, the *Ornithorhynchus paradoxus*, which is now almost extinct. At Buenos Ayres, at Valparaiso, and in the capitals of other South American States, there was little promise of the wealth and power they have since attained. The evils of slavery attracted much of his attention in Brazil, while the Spanish Republics were convulsed by chronic civil wars. Darwin, nevertheless, obtained much enjoyment and instruction from the marvels of nature in the tropical forests of the vast Brazilian territories, and from excursions up the valleys of the western slope of the Andes. Other zoologists and botanists have been enabled, however, to spend a great deal more time in those explorations, for he was bound to return to his ship.

The parts where his observations still retain most of their original scientific value, as records serviceable to natural history, including geology as well as the processes and forms of organic life, both vegetable and animal, lie along the southern coasts, in Patagonia, the Straits of Magellan, Tierra del Fuego, and the archipelago that extends northward to the island of Chiloe; again, in the remote Galapagos Islands, situated far out in the Pacific Ocean. Much of what he stated concerning the physical features, and the plants and birds and insects, of those shores has not been superseded by later competent examination. He was, of course, pretty sure to be correct, and little can have been changed in the aspects of nature in those lonely regions. It would be too long a task for us to recapitulate the results of Darwin's investigations, which have for many years past been fitted into their right place among the stores of classified materials of science. The reader who loves this kind of knowledge will find pleasure in following so great an observer and student of nature in his original notices of an immense variety of suggestive facts, and may perceive, in some of his remarks upon them, germs of the philosophical conjectures, the speculations on causes, means, and processes of organic development, that he subsequently brought into view. Much help in the comparison of allied or kindred forms is supplied by the finely drawn engravings in this edition of the book. The twentieth chapter, on the formation of coral reefs, atolls or lagoon islands, and barrier-reefs in the Indian Ocean, has of late years been made a topic of controversial criticism. But it ought to have been remembered that Darwin's theory, which was merely tentative and conjectural, was entertained many years before the deep-sea soundings had revealed quite a world of new exploration at the bottom of the ocean; and he had not the opportunity of rectifying hereby any opinion that seemed plausible in this special domain of inquiry when his views were published to the world.
