

LETTERS TO SIR GEORGE GREY.

No. VI.

CHARLES DARWIN.

THERE are a large number of letters from the illustrious naturalist, Charles Darwin, in the Grey collection. In a letter dated Down, Farnborough, Kent, November 3, 1846, Mr. Darwin writes to Captain Stokes about some memo. of his that had been sent on to Sir George Grey with a mischievous intention. On November 10, 1846, Darwin writes to Sir George Grey:—"I beg to thank you for the courteous tone of your communication of the 10th of May, 1846, considering the circumstances under which it was written. I enclose a letter which I immediately wrote to Captain Stokes and his answer; these will, I trust, exonerate us of intentional impertinence. Some most malicious person must have sent my note to you. I have been much mortified by perusing it, and though I am not presumptuous enough to suppose that you can care much for my opinion of your work on Australia it is a satisfaction to me to be enabled to name to myself many individuals to whom I have expressed my strong opinion of the many high qualities shown in your work, of which the amusement it afforded was but a small part. Your account of the aborigines I have always thought one of the most able ever written."

On November 13, 1847, Darwin writes to Sir George:—"Ever since the voyage of the Beagle [it will be remembered that Darwin was the naturalist on the scientific voyage of H.M.S. Beagle] I have felt the deepest interest with respect to all our colonies in the Southern Hemisphere. However much trouble and anxiety you must have had, and will still have, it must ever be the highest gratification to you to

reflect on the prominent part you have played in two countries destined in future centuries to be great fields of civilisation. You are so kind as to offer aid in any natural history researches in New Zealand. I have no personal interest on any point there; but there are two subjects which have long appeared to me well deserving investigation; and if hereafter your labours should be lightened you might like to attend to them yourself or direct the attention to them of any naturalist under you. The first is, an examination of any limestone caverns. Such exist near the Bay of Islands, and I daresay elsewhere. I was prevented from examining them by their having been used as places of burial. Digging in the mud under the usual stalagmitic crust would probably reveal bones of the contemporaries of the Dinornis. I think there is a special interest on this point, from New Zealand being at present so eminently instructive in a negative point of view with respect to the distribution of terrestrial mamifers." Darwin then proceeds at considerable length to direct the attention of Governor Grey to the occurrence of erratic boulders in New Zealand. He says:—"I consider it as a most important question as bearing upon the former climate of the world to know whether such proofs occur generally in the Southern Hemisphere as in the Northern. . . . I saw, inland of the Bay of Islands, large, rounded blocks of greenstone, but I was unable to ascertain whether the parent rock was far distant, nor did I then see the full importance of the question, otherwise I would have devoted every hour to it. . . . I would myself go through much labour to investigate the erratic phenomena and trace its limits and age."

In a letter dated Down, Bromley, Kent, written while Sir G. Grey was Governor at the Cape, Mr. Darwin says:—"I have during many years been collecting all the facts and reasoning which I could in regard to the variation and origin of species, intending to give, as far as lies in my power, the many difficulties surrounding the subject on all sides. One chief line of investigation naturally is concerned with the amount of variation of all our domestic animals. For various reasons I have de-

terminated to work especially on pigeons, poultry, ducks, and rabbits, though at the same time I am most grateful for any facts on all our other domesticated quadrupeds and birds. I have been buying all the races of pigeons in order to watch them living and make skeletons of them when dead. I find from various old works that the Dutch formerly (as now) were great fanciers, and it has occurred to me that breeds may in former times have been carried to the Cape of Good Hope, and may still be retained there, and that these might possibly belong to breeds now lost in Europe, or rare, or even slightly modified. Now, would you confer the very great favour on me to make inquiries for me on this head? . . . In the same way I should be most grateful for any breeds of the domestic duck or poultry if bred at the Cape for many generations: or for any information regarding any poultry kept by any of the aborigines, but these it would be impossible to get skinned. Mr. Andersen has promised to draw up for me an account of the several breeds of cattle and dogs kept by the several tribes on the western coast. If at any time you could aid me in this respect the aid would be very valuable. Very slight differences in some respects are almost as interesting as greater ones in the different breeds. But I fear that I shall have exhausted your patience, and I do not know whether your good nature will lead you to forgive the intrusion of a brother naturalist who collected and worked on board H.M.S. Beagle on her voyage round the world." Mr. Darwin then states his opinion on some matters referred to by Sir George in previous letters regarding fossils found in Ceylon.

We have not in the collection the letters written by Sir George Grey to Darwin, so that we cannot form much idea of what aid he gave Mr. Darwin. But it is remarkable that we should have here in Auckland one of the earliest mentions by Darwin of his intention to investigate the whole subject of the origin of species, which resulted in the publication of the most remarkable and revolutionary books ever given to the world.