

fellows. If it be true, as Fanny Kemble declares, that the writing of comedy is purely professional, that may Mr. Irving be described fairly enough as an actor of comedy led away by a morbidly insatiable and education, and still further diverted from his true love by the ambition and opportunity of his age. Now in *Digby Grant*—an elderly, pompous, pique-proof, respectable man—there is nothing either tragic or heroic. The character is avowedly comic, but it has melodramatic possibilities, being really an easy, in moral aspects. As Mr. Irving, with his indolence in his play, is fully defined within the compass of his imperiousness, his feelings, his limited, more obvious; the call on his gifts are excessive—he is able to play it as he has never played anything else (Chaucer excepted), not even the touchstone and measured masterpiece of *DuRoi*. By his utterance of "it is the cause," or "Bring forth men-children only," he does nothing and sits about; but, as he says it, "A little change" becomes biographical, while in the intention he fails for "You annoy me very much," there is a complete revelation of character. It is not he to play Shalinski, but as he played it on probably, on stage, Louis XII. Lorenzo, but as he played it on Wednesday in *Digby Grant* is worthy to rank with the masterpiece of modern dramatic art. Why he prefers the false to the true, the factitious to the real, the didactic in tragedy to the fine place in a certain sort of comedy, the exercise of a talent that is only respectable by reason of the necessary absence of anything superior to that of a talent rare in type and unsurpassably second in quality, are questions we do not enter upon.

### "ERASMUS DARWIN."

The title-page of this book fails in one respect to give a fair representation of the contents for Mr. Darwin's estimate of his ancestor, introduced under the modest name of a preliminary notice, is a full and laud of the volume, and not the least interesting part. It appears that Robert Darwin, the father of Erasmus, had some turn for natural science; so that Mr. Darwin's family is an even stronger example of hereditary grace than we already know it to be. Erasmus showed a taste for both poetry and mechanics at an early age. That he was ready with his pen at the age of sixteen we see by a very droll correspondence in which his sister Susannah contained him on the question of fencing, and sent him "A Diary in Latin," showing her own performance in that way. Erasmus replied in a sufficiently well-maintained tone of solemn gravity, and with a good command of language. The point of consciousness on which Erasmus especially desired his opinion is too singular to be passed over. She wrote—"As soon as we kill our hog I intend to take part thereof with y<sup>r</sup> Family, for I'm informed by a learned Divine y<sup>r</sup> Hog's Flesh is Fish, and has been so ever since y<sup>r</sup> Devil earned him y<sup>r</sup> and they ran into y<sup>r</sup> Sea; if you and the rest of the Cavities in your neighbourhood are of y<sup>r</sup> same opinion, it will be a greater satisfaction to me, in receiving so timely a point of Conviction." It is not easy to believe that the rock the learned divine's doctrine assailed (his might have made it more plausible by appealing to *Leviathan*, or, at a decent name for the porpoise among seamen); but the diary of his having in serious enough.

After a course of general and medical study at Cambridge and Edinburgh we find Erasmus Darwin settled in practice at Lichfield in 1758, and married in the following year. His subsequent life, though active, was not eventful; and Mr. Darwin has avoided the formal appearance of a continuous chronicle and given us a general picture of the man. Among Erasmus Darwin's friends were Dr. Josiah Wedgwood, Bolton, Watt, and Edgeworth; Hutton, "the founder of the modern science of geology," appears also to have been an familiar terms with him. From a letter of Hutton's Mr. Darwin quotes a vigorous and amusing paragraph on the necessity for all who can afford it—of hunting to be ceased by chance. Of Dr. Darwin's well-to-do patients we hear very little; but his reputation was such that he had virtually the assurance of an appointment as Court physician if he had chosen to migrate to London. His dealings with the poorer sort were generous. The much at least is shown to have been generous by two very curious anecdotes of their gratitude, which are given with considerable reserve as to their truth in detail. His capacity for just and generous feeling on a large scale is evidenced by his protest against slavery, a protest in which at the time he stood almost alone.

A vivid imagination, an "overpowering tendency to theorize and generalize," and "great facility in explaining any difficult subject," are set down as prominent in Dr. Darwin's intellectual character; students of the important and extensive subject of heredity will not fail to note with regard to these points that they are likewise prominent in the work which has made his descendant illustrious and cast back a reflected light upon the ancestor. The account of Erasmus's other descendants which will be found at page 50 of the manual, must not be omitted in this notice. His descendants show the rare quality of intellectual distinctness. To forgive one's parodies is a virtue to which he is entitled in more than can be expected of human nature; but it seems from Edgeworth's testimony that Erasmus Darwin cheerfully admitted the "wit, ingenuity, and poetic merit" of the "Lovers of the Triangles." And the case was one of unexceptionable heredity, though perhaps the victim did not himself fully know it. Even since the days of the *Amoræ* like persons continue to know what "The Lovers of the Triangles" were like have found in the same and most pleasant way of satisfying their curiosity to read "The Lovers of the Triangles" instead. On the subjects of education, sanitary arrangements, diet and exercise, Dr. Darwin's opinions were much

in advance of those current in his time. He was an earnest advocate of temperance in an intemperate age (not of the absolute abstinence of all strong drink, though the modest total abstinence party claims him as a forerunner); and so far as his personal influence extended he achieved considerable success. He did not even touch upon general philosophical opinions, but he naturally did not escape being called an atheist. Mr. Darwin's avowed conclusions are evidence that he was a theist. Arguments are revivified Voltaire in concluding a strong belief in a Creator with a dislike of all dogmatic systems professing to embody a revelation. The Unitarianism of his day (which, it must be remembered, was still a dogmatic and supernatural system) did not attract him; he called it a feather-bed to catch a falling Christian. In Dr. Darwin's part of this book is a remark from the "Zoonomia," which goes to the root of the question lately much agitated in various forms of the bearing of evidence on natural theology. "If we carry comparison," said Darwin, "between the evidence of the great ability of power to cause the causes of effects than to cause the effects themselves." The same thought was unconsciously repeated long afterwards by Kingsley at the end of the "Water Babies" (not the least philosophical of Kingsley's works), where we read that "supplies can make things, but the real art is to make things make themselves."

It is unfortunate that the account of Dr. Darwin's history published here been mixed up with so much that is unscrupulously. The life published by Miss Leward in 1864 abounds in fictions, and some of them are unpalatable fictions. The character of the book was not unknown at the time, and one of the worst fictions was specifically commented on. But the book was amusing and the conditions were forgotten; and later writers have used it without suspicion. Miss Leward's fictions had become, as is usual in such cases, a more or less solid foundation in fact. This appears to be the case with one of her odder tales, which describes Dr. Darwin as "in a high state of vicious exaltation" on a water-pipe on the Tower. The story runs that he even showed in his clothes, walked to Nottingham, and there "mounted on a tub and huzzared the mob in an extremely sensible manner on sanitary arrangements." All this is on the face of it pretty improbable; but the story was so a certain confirmation by the fact that it was the best, who was applied to on the point raised in Miss Leward's publication.

It must be added that Mr. Darwin's memoir, apart from the interest of the subject, is a remarkably pleasing performance in its kind; it is written throughout with a certain happy simplicity of which he is a master. We now come to Dr. Darwin's essay. His attention was turned to Erasmus Darwin by a hint given in the later editions of "The Origin of Species," and we have here the result of a study of the elder Darwin's works which he thought unadvised. And the result is both curious and instructive. In Erasmus Darwin, says Dr. Krause, "we find the same indefatigable spirit of research, and almost the same biological tendency, as in his grandson; and we might, not without justice, suppose that latter had proceeded to an intellectual inheritance and carried out a program indicated for and left behind by his grandfather." Erasmus Darwin attacked precisely the same problems as his grandson, with a similar aim, and with the same kind of "preparatory, amounting almost to divination," as to the solutions to be expected. And the conclusions at which he actually arrived were very much like those of Charles Darwin. Notwithstanding all this, Erasmus Darwin's work remained a sketch and no more. It was received by his contemporaries not only with incredulity but with indifference or ridicule, and was far from practical purposes out of mind until in our own generation the acceptance of the doctrine of evolution by states revolutionized many of our commonest notions. In the eyes of the present day Erasmus Darwin's failure of the work in its own time must not be put down wholly, or even chiefly, to the age not being ripe for it. The elder Darwin saw the future path of discovery in a general way; he collected and accumulated on many of the most important facts, and his comments were right as far as they went. In Krause quotes his notices of the rudimentary organs in various animals, of the defensive apparatus against insects occurring in immensely various forms in plants, and of the changes produced when three human experiences in domesticated breeds. But with all this his theory missed the weight and substance which bring conviction; it did not obtain its due; for it was discovered, at any rate, to be regarded as an ingenuous attempt in the right direction; but it cannot be said that the reform of the scientific world to accept it in that form was unjust. One thing was wanting, and the defect was vital. Erasmus Darwin never laid hands on the master-key of natural selection. There is no more striking example of the manner in which the most ingenious accumulations of facts and partial hypotheses may remain comparatively barren until some actual coincidence of industry and genius strikes out the idea by which the materials are knit together in a lasting fabric. It is noteworthy that Erasmus Darwin himself had at certain points the sense of wanting a master-key. In Dr. Darwin's *Zoonomia*, p. 151, we find Mr. Darwin once or twice interesting examples of apparently scientific errors of fact which have led to a whole train of wrong explanations, and thus obscured the true state of the case. Erasmus Darwin was wholly mistaken as to the function of honey in the economy of plants; and Dr. Krause shows in detail how he did this for us. Although the facts established by Dr. Krause's essay thoroughly justify its concluding words: "Erasmus Darwin's system was in itself a most significant first step in the path of knowledge which his grandson has opened up for us, but to walk to review it at the present day, he has his own sense seriously attempted, shows a weakness of thought, and a mental attachment which is almost a crime." But it is the magnitude of what he did in scientific paradoxes a commonly held incorrect proportion to this grasp of the subject.

Mr. Darwin's part in this volume must not go unnoticed. We have not seen the original, but his translation has every appearance of being thoroughly well executed; and, what is not easy to attain in translating from German, it is pleasant reading and all but irreproachable English.

\* "Erasmus Darwin." By Ernst Krause. Translated from the German by W. S. Dallas. With a Preliminary Notice by Charles Darwin. (London: John Murray, 1879.)