

Worms and Their Ways.

At the age of seventy-two, Charles Darwin, the illustrious naturalist, makes another addition to the sum of human knowledge. He reveals to us the important part played by worms in fertilizing the earth.

He calls them Nature's plowmen, who are ceaselessly burrowing, mellowing, enriching the ground. They fill themselves full of the crude earth below the surface. This they slowly digest, forming a vegetable mould, which they deposit on the surface, thus constantly improving the quality of the soil, and gradually burying out of sight rocks and all other insoluble substances.

For half a century Mr. Darwin has been observing the habits of worms, and has gradually accumulated a surprising number of facts concerning them, and their agency in rendering this earth of ours habitable.

Not many animals, he assures us, have played so important a part in the history of the world as these lowly beings which we tread so thoughtlessly under our feet. Neither the huge elephant nor the kingly lion are so useful to man.

Some of our angling readers may be relieved to know that worms, when they are disturbed in their privacy by the ruthless boy, or cut in halves by the farmer's hoe, do not suffer as much as their contortions would lead us to suppose. They are not over-sensitive.

They have no eyes and no ears. Sense of smell they probably have; and it is certain that they can taste, for they show a decided preference for some kinds of food. They are fond of leaves and of some roots; but their favorite morsel is the onion. In the arrangement and protection of their holes, they display a limited, yet not inconsiderable, intelligence.

The main object, however, of Mr. Darwin's new work is to show the wonderful process by which these creatures unceasingly *digest* crude earth, and even little pebbles, into fertile mould. In every acre of humid land there are from thirty-five thousand to fifty thousand worms, which employ themselves continually in plowing and enriching the soil.

Our author shows that the amount of worm "casts" deposited upon an acre in a year may amount in favorable circumstances to as much as fourteen tons. Roman camps, and even cities, have probably, in long processes of time, been buried by them. All this is exceedingly wonderful and interesting.