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“SALUS POPULI SUPREMA LEX.”

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26, 1882.

CHARLES DARWIN.

CHARLES DARWIN is dead. These simple words possess a significance for us that in the first moment of grief we cannot fully appreciate; the full realisation of their meaning will, alas! be increasingly apparent as in the future we wait in vain to witness fresh evidences of activity from that grandly conquering intelligence which will never again unfold for us the secrets of the natural universe. Charles Darwin is dead. The mournful news strikes with a force the stronger, perhaps, because with almost impious expectation we had cherished the idea that one who had done such vast labours in behalf of science and of all human knowledge, could with difficulty be regarded as a merely mortal being; we have, in a spirit of almost unconscious adoration, connected the man with his work; and because the one was beyond question immortal, we had associated the persistence of it and its consequences with its author. At this time it is scarcely possible to do more than bewail the loss that weighs so heavily on us; but with the sense of desolation, nevertheless, there arises also a certain conviction, that though the presence has departed from our midst, nothing can ever dim the greatness, the splendour, or the value of the achievements that presence wrought. For ever and ever, while men continue to reap the benefits that Darwin has conferred on the whole of humanity, human gratitude and human love will testify to the immeasurable treasures bequeathed to every member of a civilised community during his life-long devotion to the study of nature.

And what has he not done to deserve this tribute to his memory? In what department of knowledge is there not something gained through the exercise of his great genius? Even the world of politics, usually the last to be influenced by the spirit of discovery and research, has, equally with every other sphere of intellectual excitement, shared in the application of those natural laws for the first time founded on firmly-rooted bases by the late apostle of evolution. Medicine, the most conservative of sciences, is no less his eternal debtor, and this, perhaps, even the more considerably by reason of the potential progress of which it is capable, in consequence of the means of study presented to it in the Darwinian philosophy. Though not of it, in the sense of being actually a member of the medical profession, except in so far as he was made so by the conferring on him of an honorary M.D. degree by the University of Leyden, Darwin was, nevertheless, in spirit and in thought, pre-eminently with us in every act and conception of his life. Not yet, indeed, can we see the immensity of his services to medical science, because we are not yet more than without the threshold of that science of comparative medicine which, by-and-by, will assuredly enlighten every existing mystery of disease. The study of etiology along the lines of developmental history, and of the evolution of disease through the animate world, is, by slow degree, assuming definite shape and limits; and can we hesitate to acknowledge that the impetus given to its prosecution originated in the labours of the philosopher who is now numbered among the illustrious dead?

In this country, it may be safely said, the author of the modern theory of descent was, during his life, regarded with less veneration than was universally accorded to him abroad. But even here he was always surrounded by a circle of earnest and devoted friends, whose remaining years will be solaced by the recollection of their close-drawn intimacy with the modest, kindly, unassuming spirit that shed such lustre on his name and nation. With the exception of certain honorary distinctions—granted somewhat late, it must be said, by Universities—Darwin received no recognition from sources whence marks of admiration of great powers and great deeds usually proceed. We cannot but regret that the greatest genius of our century was permitted to dwell in close retirement at the very doors of the State, without one single mark of national pride in his possession, while foreign countries not only accepted, and adopted, his teachings, but in many ways showed the honours which they would have delighted to shower upon him. The subject of such shameful neglect was himself careless, if not even unconscious, of the slight. Confident of the truth his life was spent in unfolding; happy beyond measure in his social relations; surrounded by friends who gladly acknowledged his supremacy, and faithfully observed his doctrines, he doubtless rejoiced in the immunity he enjoyed from the cares inseparably associated with mere worldly exaltation. But though we may be unfeignedly glad that so noble a representative of English thought and English science was enabled to pursue his path through life under circumstances the most advantageous for the fulfilment of his own designs, this can never absolve the responsible agents of his

neglect from the censure merited by their conduct. Whether this was dictated by narrow, spiteful opposition to views which, because they were, to them, incomprehensible, were therefore unpalatable, or due to inability to perceive the important nature of the consequences of Darwin's work, detracts nothing from the conduct itself. It is well that the same little, ignoble feeling has not been permitted to influence the performance of the last act of tardy acknowledgment that is possible in this direction. There is but one appropriate resting-place for the greatest naturalist in the world—the founder of the modern school of biology, the most illustrious scientific *savant* of the century—and that place is amidst those who are by right regarded as the creators of our intellectual superiority—in the national fame of Westminster.

Darwin was born in 1809; it was fifty years later that his most important work was given to the world under the title of "The Origin of Species." The story of its appearance in consequence of the simultaneous production of an essay of a similar nature by Mr. Wallace, is sufficiently familiar; but it should be remembered, too, that Mr. Wallace was from the first an ardent champion of Mr. Darwin's superiority and priority; and especially of the claim the latter possessed to the greater honour in consequence of the vast array of facts and observations on which his theory was based. Of the storm of opposition created by the "Origin" nothing need now be said. Like every invulnerable truth, it has triumphed in all directions; and so unanimous is the opinion now expressed on it by every competent critic that it is unusual to hear it controverted by any save a very few individuals. Thinkers of the type of the late Louis Agassiz attacked it at first; Agassiz, indeed, to the time of his death refused acceptance of its conclusions; but it would be unfair to criticise too closely either the grounds or the manner of his opposition, or of that shown by those who were at one with him on the question. In the future, evolution as propounded by Darwin will be considered not so much on account of the data which support it, as in respect to the outcome of the theory in every civilised relation; on account of the impetus it has given to progress; and the unmistakable intellectual development to which it has everywhere given rise. For though others before him had evolved crude notions of a somewhat similar character, such as Lamarck and the author of the "Vestiges," incorporated in their accounts of the creation, does this take anything from the importance of Darwin's performances? He not only expounded and rendered intelligible the clouded ideas of these forerunners, but, above all, he established them on an impregnable basis of facts gathered during the long years of unceasing toil that preceded their presentation in the volume which brought on its author the outspoken condemnation of frightened conservatives. Fortunately this period of combat has long been passed; and firmly established as the groundwork of natural science, the theory of evolution no longer excites angry discussion whenever it is mentioned, but is even accepted as consonant with the views of those who would formerly have regarded its acceptance as evidence of the most outrageous heresy.

Darwin's life has been continuously that of a student.

We cannot but congratulate ourselves, too, that from an early age he was absolutely freed by family circumstances from the necessity of disturbing his researches for the purpose of following a remunerative profession. To this mainly is attributable the extent and consecutiveness of his labours; and hence, chiefly also, the remarkable value they possess. That he would have achieved great triumphs in any case, we must feel assured; but that he could have accomplished what he has done under less favourable surroundings is hardly probable. Moreover, all that he has left in the way of intellectual treasure has been a free gift to mankind; no assistance has been bestowed by the nation or by societies, and this is hardly another matter for congratulation to us as a people.

We have not desired to write the life of Darwin, or to detail his numerous labours. Both the one and the other will, ere this is in type, be familiar to every reader of these lines. We have wished only to testify, in the feeble way that words permit, the sense of loss that we experience at the death of one who can never be replaced—who was familiar as a friend, though chiefly known because his influence is all-pervading. We of this generation shall never judge him as he is worthy to be judged; but as the world grows better and greater in the magnitude of general good, each succeeding generation of men will be better able to appraise the value of him to whom, in most part, their improvement will be ascribable.

#### THE ROYAL IRISH UNIVERSITY.

THE latest Irish educational bubble has burst, and the Royal Irish University created—amidst much political trumpeting—to solve the problem of unhampered higher education in Ireland, has stepped down from the educational elevation which it was designed to occupy, and has taken its lowly place amongst the numerous other politico-religious jobbing *cliques* to which Ireland is already condemned. The long expected appointment of Fellows and Examiners by the Senate has taken place, and the list of names which we publish to-day is a complete justification of the apprehensions which we have already expressed that the occasion would be seized to degrade science in Ireland, and perpetrate a wholesale job. The Senate has made it clearly understood that industry-attainments and scientific character have no value in their eyes, as compared with politics, religion, and personal influence, and has by this, its first act, given the public to understand that the degrees to be granted by this University may probably be manipulated as the Fellowships and Examinerships have been, so as to maintain a contemptible standard of education.

We do not feel it our province to criticise the appointments made outside the medical faculty, but we cannot refrain from observing that the list of Fellows in classics, English and Moral Philosophy is conspicuous by the absence from it of the names of those universally recognised as the greatest Irish literates in these departments, while it contains the names of several who clearly obtained the £400 a year salary of a Fellow, not because