

**RECORD:** Anon. 1882. [Obituary] Charles Darwin (11 May), p. 190 and [Review of] Journal of researches (June 1), p. 228, from *The Youth Companion*.

**REVISION HISTORY:** Transcribed by Christine Chua and edited by John van Wyhe 2.2020. RN1.

[page] 190

CHARLES DARWIN.

In Charles Darwin, who died at his rural home in England on the 20th of April [19 April], at the age of seventy-three, one of the few really great men of our time passed away.

It is not too much to say that no man of this generation has exercised a greater influence upon the thought and current belief of mankind. If he was not the founder of a new school of science and natural philosophy, he at least developed and nourished such a school, and gave a fresh direction to the sciences which relate to the origin and physical progress of the human race.

Darwin, during his long life, had to pass through the same course, first of ridicule, then of detraction, then of fierce disputing, and finally of recognition, which most pioneers of knowledge have undergone. In another age he would, like Galileo, have been cast into prison; or like Huss, have been condemned to the stake. Happily, his life was cast in an era of freedom and of universal inquiry and curiosity.

His worst calamity was, in early life, to be mercilessly assailed by pen and tongue. His ripe reward was the general confession, in his old age, that his studies and his theories—even though the latter might not command united assent—were the product of a great, far-reaching and thoroughly sincere mind.

Darwin, indeed, was the head and the chief of that high school of science in which are enrolled the names of the first English scientific writers of the age. Among his disciples are Huxley, Tyndall and Herbert Spencer. These have each adopted and carried into their own fields of research the first great principles of the Darwinian doctrine.

From his youth Darwin was a most eager student of physical and natural science. This taste was hereditary; for his grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, was one of the leading English scientific scholars of the last century. On the maternal side, Darwin was the grandson of the famous Josiah Wedgwood, the founder of the pottery industry which, far and wide, is known by his name.

After graduating at Oxford [Cambridge], Darwin made a five years' voyage around the world in the ship *Beagle*. During this voyage he devoted himself with intense ardor to the study of the geology, botany and natural features of the many remote lands which he visited. His first book—the learning and boldness of thought of which at once attracted the attention of the English scientific world—was a "Journal" of his observations while a passenger in the *Beagle*. It foreshadowed the direction in which his studies were drifting him.

He turned his attention to the problem of physical life; the physical mystery of the existence of men, animals, plants. The ripe result of this study was his great book, "The Origin of Species," which appeared twenty-three years ago, and which start led the world with Darwin's great theory of evolution and natural selection. The best and simplest definition of this theory, perhaps, has been thus recently stated: "that all forms of vegetable and animal life have been produced by a series of natural changes, in natural descent from parents to offspring, through a long line of ancestry. The weakest members of a society become extinct, while the fittest—those most in harmony with their surroundings—survive. Thus the variations survive by 'selection' which are best fitted to benefit the species. This process of what Darwin calls 'natural selection' is a process of improvement, ever keeping pace with the infinite variations in the conditions of animal existence."

This book was followed by that on the "Descent of Man," [1871] in which Darwin carried his theories to yet bolder conclusions. In this he claimed that man was developed from a lower order of animal life; and inferred that "man is descended from a hairy quadruped, furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in its habits;" that is, inhabiting forests. In short, he believed that the human race is descended from a species of apes.

Darwin's life, from first to last, was that of an ardent, sincere, retiring, truth-searching student. He lived in the depths of the country, "far from the madding crowd," and was rarely seen in the busy haunts of men. He had all the modesty and gentle simplicity of character which seem in peculiar harmony with greatness of mind and the genius of scholarship.

Death found him patiently pursuing his favorite studies, which were still valuable in more and more broadening and strengthening his famous theories.

There can be no doubt that his renown will increase rather than diminish; and that, whether his theories become at last universally accepted or not, they will certainly greatly influence, in the future as in the past, the current of scientific research and the tendency of scientific discovery.

[page] 228

#### DARWIN'S FIRST WORK.

The later writings of Charles Darwin have somewhat cast into the shade his first contribution to knowledge, the narrative of his voyage round the world in the ship of war The Beagle, commanded by Capt. FitzRoy, of the English navy. Darwin was only twenty-two years of age when he was appointed naturalist to this expedition, which was employed during five years in the objects assigned to it by the Government.

Starting in December, 1831, the ship sailed nearly all round South America, stopping long at the chief points of interest, and thus affording the young naturalist opportunities to make extensive excursions into the interior. He made a considerable stay in Patagonia. It was while observing the people of that land of sterility and desolation that he seems first to have made

the reflections which led him to the theories of the origin and descent of our race by which he is chiefly known. From South America he sailed among the groups of the Pacific, and so across to Australia and returned to England in 1836, laden with knowledge which he spent some years in arranging for publication.

It is our belief that remote posterity will cherish the little volumes which contain his personal narrative. The work is a true classic. It shows that Charles Darwin had as great a genius for the observation and interpretation of nature as Shakespeare had for the delineation of human character. Such fulness and accuracy, such wisdom and modesty, such an absolute avoidance of everything resembling vanity or pretence, we have never seen in the work of so young a man. Even the occasional lapses from purity of style seem to add a charm to this exquisite book.

The beautiful human feeling which breathes in its pages wins the reader's heart. The passage near the close beginning, "I thank God I shall never again visit a slave country," is deeply touching in its simplicity and truth. It is good to remember that when he wrote it our controversy on that subject was approaching its climax, and he evidently meant it to be a help to us in our dire perplexity and peril.

We commend this work to all our readers, young and old, who have a taste either for natural science or for strange adventures. A cheap and neat edition was published in 1846 by the Harpers and, we believe, it can still be procured.