

THE CONTRIBUTOR.

Original Letters of Charles Darwin to an Australian Settler.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SYDNEY MAIL.

Sir,—By the courteous permission of Mr. Thomas Rawlinson, of Bega, to whom they were handed over by the family of the late Mr. Syme Covington, of Pambula, your readers may have the gratification of perusing some interesting letters of the eminent naturalist and scientific writer above named.

It may be remembered that Mr. Darwin was the naturalist on board H.M.S. Beagle (commanded by Captain Robert Fitzroy), which sailed round the world in the years 1831-6, visiting Sydney amongst other places; and he made an excursion thence to the Blue Mountains, which is described in his "Journal;" though the notice is scarcely flattering or indicative of the prominence which the district is at present attaining. But his grandfather, Dr. Erasmus Darwin, being gifted with higher imaginative faculties, had previously predicted the future greatness of our capital in those favourite lines:—

Where Sydney Cove her lucid bosom swells,
Courts her young navies, and the storm repels . . .
There shall broad streets their stately walls extend,
The circus widen, and the crescent bend . . .
Tall spires and dome-capt towers, ascend,
And piers and quays their massive structures blend.

Mr. Covington was a shipmate of Mr. Darwin's in the Beagle (though a comparatively humble one), and had so won the lasting regard of the other that they afterwards corresponded familiarly and affectionately over a lengthened period, whilst the latter was writing his great books in the quiet of an English home, and the former was following far different occupations in a very dissimilar place—in this Colony—though able once to render good help to a work of his friend, then in progress, by furnishing him with a large and much-prized collection of "barnacles," obtained from the rocks near to Pambula.

Mr. Darwin's share of that correspondence (which I now enclose) gives insight to the pursuits of a distinguished literary man and scientist; contains many allusions to the famous volumes he was composing from time to time; shows something of the forethought, labour, and care bestowed upon them; and (despite his own ill-health) speaks well for the kindly, generous feelings of their author towards the comrades of his earlier life, whether they prospered or failed in the after-struggle—became a Colonial Governor, renowned sailor, or Pambula farmer. His letters also evince a deep interest in the fortunes of Australia, and they often refer to well-known names connected with it. They tell us, too, of the difficulty experienced even by men of Mr. Darwin's mark in providing suitable openings for their sons in crowded England, reveal his own predilections for agricultural over professional occupations (in a new country at least) to those who are both able and willing to work with their own hands; and show that, had the discovery of gold led to a dreaded event rather more than it did, New South Wales might have numbered himself amongst its settlers.

But it is chiefly in the frank, homely simplicity of their style, in the glimpses they afford of Mr. Darwin's own

But it is taken in the frank, homely simplicity of their style, in the glimpses they afford of Mr. Darwin's own patient habits amid the sore trial of sickness, in his genial remembrance of others, of whatever rank or degree, with whom he had served in former days, and in his strong Australian sympathies—joined to a great love of England, her soldiers and her sailors—that the interest and value to us of these letters will be found to consist. They furnish some evidence, at the same time, that Mr. Darwin was far from being the cold disbeliever which it has been the fashion to represent him. And the "Bar" can overlook the no very favourable estimate which he seems to have entertained of it—the more so as he gave the hope of his house to it; though I fear the "Aurists" will be scarcely so forgiving.—
Faithfully yours, ALFRED M'FARLAND.

✓ St. Leonards, July 30, 1884.

P.S.—It is a singular fact, that on the same seaboard as Pambula, and at no great distance from it, there lately lived, and for many years previously had lived, a dairy farmer who was an intimate friend, early amanuensis, and correspondent of Mr. Ruskin, as celebrated for his writings on art as was Mr. Darwin for those on natural history.—
A. M'F.

The following are the letters in question :—

"Down near Bromley, Kent,

"October 7, 1843.

"N.B.—This will be my direction for the rest of my life.

"Dear Covington.—Your new ear-trumpet has gone by the ship *Sultana*; it is enclosed in a box from Messrs. Smith and Elder to their correspondent, Mr. Evans (I suppose, bookseller). I was not able to get it sent sooner. You must accept it as a present from me. I presume you will have to pay a trifle for carriage. I recommend you to take your old one to some skilful tinman, and by the aid of an internal plaister cast I have no doubt he could make them. All that is required is an exact resemblance in form. I should think it would answer for him to make one, and hang it up in his shop with an advertisement. I was glad to get your last letter with so good an account of yourself, and that you had made a will. My health is better since I have lived in the country. I have now three children. I am yet at work with the materials collected during the voyage. My coral-reef little book has been published for a year—the subject on which you copied so much M.S. The zoology of the voyage of the *Beagle* is also completed. I have lately heard that the *Beagle* has arrived safe and sound in the Thames, but I have heard no news of any of the officers. Your friends at Shrewsbury often inquire after you. I forget whether I ever told you that Mrs. Evans is married, and that my father has built them a nice little house to live in. Captain Fitz Roy, you will have heard, is gone to New Zealand as Governor. I believe he intended to call at Sydney. With best wishes for your prosperity, which is sure to follow if you continue in your old upright prudent course, believe me, yours very faithfully,
C. DARWIN."

✂ ———
"Down Farnborough, Kent,

"March 30, 1849.

"Dear Covington,—It is now some years since I have heard from you, and I hope you will take the trouble to write to me to tell me how you and your family are going on. I should much like to hear that your worldly circumstances are in a good position, and that you are every way fortunate. I hope that your deafness has not increased. I will now

I hope that your deafness has not increased. I will now tell you about myself. My poor dear father, whom you will remember at Shrewsbury, died in his 84th year on the 13th of November. My health lately has been very bad, and I thought all this winter that I should not recover. I am now not at home (though I have so dated this letter), but have come to Malvern for two months to try the cold water cure, and I have already received so much benefit that I really hope my health will be much renovated. I have finished my three geological volumes on the voyage of the old *Beagle*, and my journal, which you copied, has come out in a second edition, and has had a very large sale. I am now employed on a large volume, describing the anatomy and all the species of barnacles from all over the world. I do not know whether you live near the sea, but if so I should be very glad if you would collect me any that adhere (small and large) to the coast rocks or to shells or to corals thrown up by gales, and send them to me without cleaning out the animals, and taking care of the tases. You will remember

that barnacles are conical little shells, with a sort of four-valved lid on the top. There are others with long flexible footstalk, fixed to floating objects, and sometimes cast on shore. I should be very glad of any specimens, but do not give yourself much trouble about them. If you do send me any, they had better be directed to the Geological Society, Somerset House, and a letter sent to inform me of them. I shall not publish my book for 18 months more.

"I have now six children—three boys and three girls—and all, thank God, well and strong. I have not seen any of our old officers for a long time. Captain Fitz Roy has the command of a fine steamer frigate. Captain Sullivan has gone out to settle for a few years, and trade at the Falkland Islands, and taken his family with him. I know nothing of the others. You will remember Evans, my father's butler at Shrewsbury; he and his wife are both dead. I should like to hear what you think of the prospects of your country. How is Captain King? Should you see Mr. Philip King, please say that I desired to be most kindly remembered to him; I was grieved to hear some long time since that he was out of health. Has he any family? I often think how many pleasant walks I had with him. Speaking of walks, I fear my day is done, and I could never tire you again. I have not been able to walk a mile for some years, but now with the water-cure I am getting stronger again. With every hope that you are happy and prosperous, believe me, dear Covington, your sincere well-wisher, C. DARWIN."

"Down Farnborough, Kent,

"November 23, 1850.

"Dear Covington,—I received your letter of the 12th of March on the 25th of August, but the box of which you advised me arrived here only yesterday. The captain who brought it made no charge, and it arrived quite safely. I thank you very sincerely for the great trouble you must have taken in collecting so many specimens. I have received a vast number of collections from different places, but never one so rich from one locality. One of the kinds is most curious. It is a new species of a genus of which only one specimen is known to exist in the world, and it is in the British Museum. I see that you are one of those very rare few who will work as hard for a friend when several thousand miles apart as when close at hand. There are at least seven different kinds in the box. The collection must have caused

miles apart as when close at hand. There are at least seven different kinds in the box. The collection must have caused you much time and labour, and I again thank you very sincerely for so kindly obliging me. I have been amused by looking over two old papers you used in packing up, and in seeing the names of Captain Wickham, Mr. Macleay, and others mentioned. I am always much interested by your letters, and take a very sincere pleasure in hearing how you get on. You have an immense, incalculable advantage in living in a country in which your children are sure to get on if industrious. I assure you that, though I am a rich man, when I think of the future I very often ardently wish I was settled in one of our Colonies, for I have now four sons (seven children in all, and more coming), and what on earth to bring them up to I do not know. A young man may here slave for years in any profession and not make a penny. Many people think that Californian gold will half ruin all those who live on the interest of accumulated gold or capital, and if that does happen I will certainly emigrate. Whenever you write again tell me how far you think a gentleman with capital would get on in New South Wales. I have heard that gentlemen generally get on badly. I am sorry to say that my health keeps indifferent, and I have given up all hopes of ever being a strong man again. I am forced to live the life of a hermit, but natural history fills up my time, and I am happy in having an excellent wife and children. Any particulars you choose to tell me about yourself always interest me much. What interest can you get for money in a safe investment? How dear is food; I suppose nearly as dear as in England? How much land have you? I was pleased to see the other day that you have a railway commenced, and before they have one in any part of Italy or Turkey. The English certainly are a noble race, and a grand thing it is that we have got securely hold of Australia and New Zealand. Once again accept my thanks for your valuable collection of barnacles, and believe me, dear Covington, your sincere friend,

“C. DARWIN.” ✓

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“Down Farnborough, Kent,

“March 14, 1852. X

“Dear Covington,—I was very much pleased a couple of months ago to receive your very interesting letter of June, 1851, with an account just such as I liked to hear of your present state and prospects and of the general condition of the Colony. You mention in your letter the discovery of gold, but since then you have had the wonderful Geelong beds discovered. Have you carried your plan into execution of going to trade at the gold mines? If you have and are returned and could spare an evening, it would amuse me much to hear what you saw there and how the people behave. Many people are proud in England at hearing that you Australians have behaved wonderfully better than the Californians. Is this so? or is all the world alike when tempted by gold? I had a note two days ago from your brother, Mr. B. Covington, of ‘28, Harding-street, Windsor, Liverpool,’ saying that he was very anxious to hear news of you; so as there was nothing in your letter to me which you could have disliked any one seeing I sent it to him. My life and pursuits are so uniform that I have really no news to tell you of myself. I have published one book on Barnacles, and am going to publish a second volume, and quite lately I have been examining some of the specimens you sent me, and very useful and interesting they proved. My health keeps indifferent. The only officer of the Beagle that I have seen for several years is Captain Sullivan, who paid me a visit on his return lately from the

Sullivan, who paid me a visit on his return lately from the Falkland Islands, where he and three other gentlemen have set up a large cattle farm, and hope it will answer very well. With my best wishes for your prosperity and happiness, believe me your friend,

“ CHARLES DARWIN.”

“ Down Bromley, Kent,

“ October 21, 1853.

“ Dear Covington,—I received your letter dated May 26, '53, at Pambala, here at Down on Oct. 11, which I think is very quick. I thank you sincerely for writing, as I had for some time been thinking how you were getting on. From what we see in the papers, most of us in England have got an awful idea of the state of things at the diggings. Your account of the way the Sunday was kept near the Ovens was very pleasant to hear. On the spot you must, of course, judge best, but I should have liked to have heard of your turning up a fine nugget worth some hundred pounds, and that would have repaid you for your long journey, which I traced by your letter on the map. Well, I daresay it was almost worth your while once to have seen the diggings, for it must be a curious spectacle. I should like very much at some future time to hear how you get on, and whether the mining has done you and other residents near Twofold Bay good or harm. About half a year ago I had Mr. Septimus Martin, the son of the rector of the adjoining parish, dining with me; he has now gone back to Melbourne, and is married. He had formerly been at Twofold Bay, and told me a little about it. I feel a great interest about Australia, and read every book I can get hold of. I lately read a long one by Colonel Mundy. I really have no news to tell you of myself; we live a most quiet life. I have not yet finished my second volume on the Barnacles, but hope soon to do so, and begin some other subject. I saw a few weeks ago Captain Fitz Roy; perhaps you heard that a year or two ago he had the great misfortune of losing his wife. I am afraid he lost much money by his government of New Zealand. I saw also Captain Sullivan, who has now half-a-dozen children. Lastly, the only other officer I have heard of, Melleish, has greatly distinguished himself by hard fighting with some Chinese Pirates. We are all much afraid of war with Russia, which, pray God, may be prevented. You might like to hear that two or three years ago Fuegia was heard of by a sealer in the west part of the Straits of Magellan. He could still speak some English. With every good wish for yourself and family, pray believe me your faithful friend,

“ C. DARWIN.”

“ Down Farnborough, Kent,

“ February 28, 1855.

“ Dear Covington,—I was very glad to get your letter about six weeks ago, dated August 8, 1854, with so good an account of yourself, your affairs, and your children. You have exactly the same family which we have—five boys and two girls; but you beat me in being able to say that yours are all strong and healthy, which is hardly the case with mine, though none have anything serious amiss with them. How little you thought when we landed together at Sydney, that you should one day have land and house letting for £83 per annum. I am very glad to hear the Colony is pro-

gressing so well, and that, as you say, “our good Queen

gressing so well, and that, as you say, "our good Queen has not more loyal subjects in her dominions than are the Australians." I have lately seen and heard news, more especially of the gold districts, from a Mr. Mackenzie, who was a schoolmaster at Sydney and afterwards a surveyor, has made a nice fortune, and, his wife dying there, he has come back with his one daughter to end his days here, and has published a little book describing Australia. But he seemed to regret Australia. I am sure this last winter, with six weeks' frost, and with the thermometer sometimes at 0°, is enough to make anyone past boyhood wish to be in a warmer and better climate. We were during this time in London, for we took a house for a month to have a little amusement, but the weather was cold and the streets all so dirty and snowy that it looked very dismal. The Thames was nearly quite frozen over. I have heard nothing of late of our old shipmates. Captain Fitz Roy is head of a department for keeping an account of observations on wind, weather, and currents made over all the world. He is married again, but I have not seen his wife. Captain Sullivan acquired much credit in the Baltic, and he has now commissioned another small ship, and will sail again soon for the Baltic, and I shall go and see him before he sails. He has now six or seven children. Captain Stokes is in England. I saw him some months ago. I hear he does little now but shoot and hunt. There has been terrible dissatisfaction in England about the management of the war, which seems to have been very badly conducted; but the men and officers have behaved most nobly, and have made the name of Englishmen a prouder thing than ever. Let me hear again from you. To what shall you bring up your boys? I wish to God I knew what to do with mine.—Believe me, with every good wish, your friend,

"C. DARWIN."

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"Down Bromley, Kent.

"March 9, '56.

"Dear Covington,—I was very glad to get a month or six weeks ago your letter of the 4th of September, with its interesting account of the state of the Colony and your own affairs, which I am most truly glad are so prosperous. You did a wise thing when you became a colonist. What a much better prospect you have for your sons, bringing them up as farmers—the happiest and most independent career a man can almost have—compared to what they could have been in this old burthened country, with every soul struggling for subsistence. I have lately been talking a good deal on the subject with Captain Sullivan, who has four boys, and who often seems half-inclined to start for some Colony and make his boys farmers. Captain Sullivan, owing to all his practice in the old Beagle (I have heard that our old ship is now a collier), was the right hand of the fleet in the Baltic, and had all the difficult work to do in placing the ships in the bombardment of Sweabourgh. I heard of a letter from a seaman in the fleet, but not in Captain Sullivan's ship, who said he was the best sailor in the whole lot, and that if the men could elect their Admiral they would elect him. Captain Stokes is married again, to a widow, and will never, I believe, go afloat again.

"I have finished my book on the barnacles (in which you so kindly helped me with the valuable Australian specimens). I found out much new and curious about them, and the Royal Soc. gave me their great gold medal (quite a nugget, for it weighs 40 sovereigns), chiefly for my discoveries in regard to these shells, which are not perfect shells, but more allied to crabs.

"My health is better, but I have a few bad

"My health is better, but I have a few bad days almost every fortnight, and cannot walk far or do any hard work. I am now employed on a work on the variation of species, and for this purpose am studying all about our domestic animals and am keeping alive all kinds of domestic pigeons, poultry, ducks. Have you ever noticed any odd breeds of poultry, or pigeons, or ducks, imported from China, or Indian, or Pacific islands? If so, you could not make me a more valuable present than a skin of such. But this, I know, is not at all likely.

"My children, thank God, are all well, and one gets, as one grows older, to care more for them than for anything in this world. With every good wish for the health and happiness of yourself and family, believe me, dear Covington, yours sincerely,
CHARLES DARWIN."

—
"Down Bromley, Kent,

"February 22, 1857.

"Dear Corington,—I received a short time since your letter of September 14, and was glad to hear how you were getting on, though the account of your affairs was not quite so prosperous as in some former letters, owing, as I understand, chiefly to the expense of your new house. But with your good sense and steadiness I have great hopes that you will tide over the time of difficulty. You must console yourself with thinking what a position you would be in here with six boys and two girls (which is now exactly my number). I never meet any one who is not perplexed what to do with their children. My eldest boy is almost a young man, and has just got into the head form at the great school of Rugby, and is very steady and good. We think of making him a Barrister, though it is a bad trade.

"Captain Sullivan has been very lucky and has got a high place, of £1000 a year, I believe, and has beaten two Admirals and Captain Fitz Roy, who tried for the same place. By the way, Captain F. with Mrs. F. are coming to-morrow to lunch with me on their road home from the Marquis of Camden. Poor Captain F. has lately lost his only daughter, a beautiful and charming girl of about 16 or 17 years old.

"I lately dined with one of your great Australian potentates, Sir W. Macarthur, and heard a good deal of news of Australia, and drank some admirable Australian wine. Yours is a fine country, and your children will see it a very great one. With every good wish for your health and prosperity, I am, dear Covington, yours sincerely,

"CH. DARWIN."

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"Down Bromley, Kent,

"May 18.

"Dear Corington,—I was glad to get some time ago your letter of the 19th of August, and I should have answered some time ago, but my health has been very indifferent of late, owing to my working too hard. I have for some years been preparing a work for publication which I commenced 20 years ago, and for which I sometimes find extracts in your handwriting! This work will be my biggest; it treats on the origin of varieties of our domestic animals and plants, and on the origin of species in a state of nature. I have to discuss every branch of natural history, and the work is beyond my strength and tries me sorely. I have just returned from staying a fortnight at a water-cure establishment, where I bathe thrice a day, and loiter about all day long doing nothing, and for the time it does me wonderful good. I suppose you have no such thing as water-cure establishments in Australia; in your fine climate and much out-of-door work such is not required, I suppose.

and much out-of-door work such is not required, I suppose.

"You say you have eight children; we beat you by one. My eldest is between 18 and 19, and is going to Cambridge in October to be educated as a Barrister, for want of a better and honest trade. I hope Pambula flourishes; in your last letter you express some fear about the road being turned and trade being thus injured; I hope that this has not happened. I have not seen a soul of an old shipmate, except Captain Fitz Roy, for the last year. Captain Sullivan lately had the misfortune to lose a child. When you feel inclined I shall be always glad to hear of your progress and well-doing, and with every good wish, I remain, yours very faithfully,
CH. DARWIN."

"Down Bromley, Kent,

"January 16, 1859.

"Dear Covington,—I have got the little book for you, but I have only this minute discovered (for the seal torn by an odd chance at the exact spot) that you asked me to get two copies. But I really think it would be superfluous As to the Aurist, you may rely on it that the man is an advertising humbug. I know plenty of people and have one relation, very deaf, and every one in London would know about this man's power of curing if true. You may depend on it that besides syringing in certain cases there is little or nothing to be done. My father, who was a very wise man, said he had known numbers who had been much injured by Aurists, and none who had been benefited. A common good surgeon can do all that these humbugs can do. I am very sorry to hear about your deafness increasing, it is a very great misfortune for you, but I fear you must look at it as incurable. I am glad to hear that you are doing pretty well; and if you can settle your sons in an agricultural line they will have no cause to complain, for no life can be more healthy or happy. We have had an unhappy summer, my eldest girl having been very ill with diphtheria, a new and very fatal throat complaint, and my

youngest baby boy having died at the same time of scarlet fever. My second daughter is also very delicate. After our misery we went to Isle of Wight for six weeks for a change. My health keeps very poor, and I never know 24 hours' comfort. I force myself to try and bear this as incurable misfortune. We all have our unhappinesses, only some are worse than others. And you have a heavy one in your deafness.

"With every good wish for the prosperity of yourself and family, believe me, dear Corington, yours very sincerely
"CH. DARWIN."
