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BOOKS.

DARWIN'S LETTERS.*

THE great unblemished name of Charles Darwin rises as high above the crowd of scientific workers in the last century that we can never learn too much about his habits of thought and methods of work. The letters which are now added to the three volumes of *Life and Letters* given to the world soon after his death in 1882 were accordingly well worth publishing. The present editors have found it possible, without repeating more than a few paragraphs from the earlier biography, "to compile an almost complete record of Mr. Darwin's work in a series of letters now published for the first time." They have used to that end seven hundred and eighty-two letters which could not find a place in the *Life and Letters*, or were not available for publication at the time of its preparation. Much of Darwin's copious correspondence with co-workers and supporters of his evolutionary doctrine, like Huxley, Lyell, Fritz Müller, Huxley, and Dr. A. R. Wallace, is of the greatest interest both to men of science who like to follow the technical details of his work, and to the general reader who is interested in the gradual growth and establishment of the most important and far-reaching generalisation that has been added to the world's stock of ideas since Newton expounded the law of universal gravitation, with its bearing upon the essential unity of the universe, and those laws of motion on which—with their ancillary of the conservation of energy—all our physical science is based. Of course, we must not be understood to suppose that Darwin discovered the doctrine of evolution, which is at least two thousand years old. What he did—being, as some one has pointed out, the thirty-seventh in a long chain of evolutionists—was to give the first clear and cogent explanation of a possible way in which the numerous species of living creatures, differing from one another as widely as the typhoid germ and the butterfly, the duck and the kangaroo, may have developed on their several lines from the primordial germ of life that originated long ago in some way which science is still powerless to conceive; and to show further that it is probable that man himself, with all the varied mental abilities that have "set the world in his heart," may be only the highest product of the same course of evolution. It was this achievement which caused the evolutionary doctrine to take root amongst the most familiar concepts of our thought and to become a corner-stone of our scheme of things, as without doubt it is nowadays, though less than fifty years have elapsed since the theory of natural selection was first placed before the world. By virtue of this great achievement the name of Darwin will stand to all time among the "masters of all who know," with those of Aristotle and Bacon, Galileo and Newton.

* (1) *Myr Letters of Charles Darwin*. Edited by Francis Darwin and A. C. Seward. 2 vols. Illustrated. London: John Murray. (2s. net.)—(2) *The Complete Writings of Charles Darwin*. Supplementary Volume. London: Macmillan and Co. (7s. 6s. net.)

The volumes now before us, whilst they add but little to our previous acquaintance with Darwin's scientific work, throw a welcome additional light upon the qualities that constituted his greatness. Chief of these, of course, must be placed his intense devotion to truth, coupled with a modesty and teachableness which are not to be found as often as one could wish in investigators of such eminence. It is curious to learn from the interesting autobiographical fragment which was brought to light in the process of removing Darwin's papers from Down that this devotion to truth was not native to his mind,—the child was anything but father of the man! He writes of the time when he was about nine or ten:—

"I was in those days a very great story-teller—for the pure pleasure of exciting attention and surprise. I stole fruit and hid it for the same motive, and injured trees by harking them for similar ends. I scarcely ever went out walking without saying I had seen a pheasant or some strange bird (natural history taste); those lies, when not detected, I presume, excited my attention, as I recollect them vividly, not connected with shame, though some I do, but as something which, by having produced a great effect on my mind, gave pleasure like a tragedy. I recollect when I was at Mr. Case's inventing a whole fabric to show how fond I was of speaking the truth! My invention is still as vivid in my mind, that I could almost fancy it was true, did not memory of former shame tell me it was false."

This might seem to be an unpromising beginning for a scientific career, and it is a useful commentary on the untruthfulness of ordinary educational psychology to note that we should be inclined to see in these childish recollections the beginning of fame in an imaginative line—the germ of a Shelley or a Balzac—rather than the foundation of a career which achieved eminence by absolute devotion to exact truth. "I believe there exists," wrote Darwin in one of these now letters when he was about forty, "and I feel within me, an ardour for truth, or knowledge, or discovery, of something

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* 21 Nov. letters of Charles Darwin. Edited by Francis Darwin and A. C. Seward. 1 vols. Illustrated. London: John Murray. (5th. ed.)—(a) The Darwin Society of London. Murray's Edition. Supplementary Volume. London: Murray and Co. (7s. 6d. net.)

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