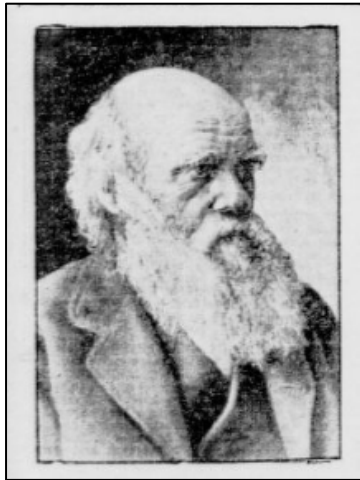


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Boyhood of Darwin.



No doubt all the little men and women who read *The Tribune* have heard of Darwin, but probably they do not feel any great interest in him. How could any one expect a boy or girl to be interested in a man who wrote a book with such a strange title as "The Origin of Species," a book which is if the truth must be told, not very easy to read even for those who know something about science.

Yet Darwin was a man in whom all children ought to be interested, for a more childlike mortal

never lived. With his big body, his great brow and his beetling eyebrows he looks somewhat formidable, but to the end of his life he was in many ways only a grown up child, so simple that he could not think any evil, so gentle and tender of heart that he could not bear the sight or the thought of suffering, and so modest and unassuming that he never could get used to the interest his books awakened, and was always surprised when any fresh proof of the world's regard and admiration came to him. Even when he made his great discovery of the origin of species, which the little folk will learn about some day, no doubt, if they have not done so already, he did not feel quite certain that he was right until Sir Charles Lyell, Sir Joseph Hooker and Professor Huxley had accepted his conclusions.

Darwin was very fond of children, too. He loved to play with his own children, and after they had grown up he sighed to think that those good times could never come back again.

Charles Robert Darwin was born at Shrewsbury, in England, on February 12, 1809, and came of a remarkable family. His father was a physician, a man of prominence in his community, and noted best for his wisdom and his kindness. The grandfather of the scientist was Erasmus Darwin, who was famous as a scientist and poet. His great-grandmother, the mother of Erasmus, was a very learned person, an unusual thing in those days, when it was thought that education was of little use to women, and his great-grandfather, the husband of this learned woman, appears to have had scientific tastes, for he is mentioned by a famous antiquary in connection with the discovery of a skeleton, as a "person of curiosity." These tastes were inherited, not only by Erasmus, but by another son. Robert, who cultivated botany and wrote a book on the subject, which was widely read and studied. In fact, a love for science ran in the Darwin blood, and medicine was the family profession.

That such a family have produced the discoverer of the origin of the species is not strange,

but when Charles Darwin was a boy no one suspected, least of all his gentle and modest self, that he was going to be the greatest of all the Darwins.

In fact, his apparent idleness and inability to apply himself to anything regarded as useful in those days, combined with his great fondness for hunting, gave his father, the doctor, much concern, and he once said- -"You care for nothing but shooting, dogs and rat catching, and you will be a disgrace to yourself and all your family." Writing of this incident afterward in his autobiography, Charles Darwin says- "My father, who was the kindest man I ever knew, must have been angry and somewhat unjust when he used such words."

But, indeed it is small wonder that the good doctor was in despair over this son, who was entirely out of harmony with the educational system of the day and whose only possible future seemed to be that of an idle sporting man. He could not make Latin verses, nor learn languages, and though he could learn lessons off by heart very easily he forgot them all twenty-four hours after.

Seeing he was doing no good at school, the doctor took him away at a rather earlier age than usual and sent him to Edinburgh University, where his older brother Erasmus, was completing his medical studies. Charles also took up the study of medicine, but wasted his time, he tells us, as much as he did at school, so far as academic studies were concerned. He found the lectures intolerably dull and knowing that his father would leave him property enough to live on comfortably, he made no serious effort to get interested in them. "Dr. Duncan's lectures on materia medica at 8 o'clock on a winter's morning are something fearful to remember," he writes. "Dr. Duncan made his lectures as dull as he was himself, and the subject disgusted me." His tender heart, too, increased his aversion to the study and practice of medicine.

On two occasions he witnessed operations in the Edinburgh Hospital, but rushed away before they were completed. It was before the blessed days of chloroform, and these two cases haunted him for years. After his son had spent two seasons at Edinburgh, Dr. Darwin perceived that he did not like the thought of being a physician, and proposed that he should become a clergyman. To this Charles made no objection. He rather liked the idea of being a country parson. With this end in view, he was sent to Cambridge, where he managed to pass his Bachelor of Arts examination creditably, but so far as deriving any benefit from the prescribed studies he considered the three years at Cambridge to have been wasted also, like the time spent at school and in Edinburgh. But all this time he was studying science. As a boy he collected all sorts of things, shells, seals, coins, minerals and birds' eggs. He was very fond of collecting birds' eggs, but never took more than one egg out of a nest having learned humanity, he tells us, from the example and instruction of his sisters. He even refrained from collecting insects for a while, except when he found them dead, because his sister

thought it cruel to kill them for the sake of making a collection. As he grew older he availed himself of every opportunity to acquire scientific knowledge, though at Edinburgh he resolved never as long as he lived to read a book on geology, the lectures on that subject at the university being "incredibly dull."

In Edinburgh he became acquainted with several young scientists, with whom he talked and studied, and in Cambridge he began to attract the attention of men of prominence and distinction. These friends encouraged him to continue his scientific studies, and Dr. Darwin began to hear, to his great joy, no doubt, and probably to his surprise, that he had a very clever son.

All this time Charles expected to become a clergyman, and a very small thing changed his plans and determined, as he afterward wrote, his whole career. On leaving Cambridge, the post of naturalist on the Beagle, a ship that was being sent out by the British government on a scientific mission around the world, was offered to him, and though no pay was attached to the position, he was eager to accept it. Dr. Darwin disapproved, however, and so that offer was refused. Fortunately, the doctor had said, "If you can find one man of common sense who advises you to go, I will give my consent."

This one man of common sense was found in the person of Josiah Wedgwood, the young man's uncle. Josiah Wedgwood thought it would be wise to accept the offer, and the refusal was immediately recalled. But again the plan nearly fell through, because Captain Fitz-Roy, of the Beagle, did not like the shape of the young naturalist's nose. He doubted if a person with a nose shaped like Charles Darwin's could possess sufficient energy and determination for the voyage, but he decided to run the risk, and appears to have been quite convinced afterward that the nose had spoken falsely.

The voyage of the Beagle lasted five years and before it was over Charles Darwin had given up all idea of being a clergyman. Henceforth his life was devoted to science, which soon absorbed him to such a degree that he lost his taste for poetry, music and pictures a matter of great regret to him. He also lost his passion for shooting, but had previously given it up because he thought it cruel. While still a young man he lost his health, and during the rest of his life was scarcely ever free from pain and weariness. But nothing could ever make him give up his work, and by making the most of the little strength he had, he accomplished a great deal.

He died in his seventy-fourth year and was buried in Westminster Abbey.