

"On This Day——"

November 24, 1859, is one of the decisive dates in the history of human thought. Darwin's "Origin of Species" was published on that day—not only published, but sold out on the day of publication, a detail demonstrating how the idea of evolution was stirring the minds of cultured Victorians. It had stirred in the brain behind Darwin's rugged brow since 1836 when he closed his voyage as a naturalist round the world. In 1842 he had sketched out his theory in manuscript, but spent sixteen years collecting information in support of it before he began the writing of his book. Meanwhile Wallace, investigating the amazing variety of animals and plants in the Dutch East Indies had reached similar conclusions about the gradual development of new species in the struggle for existence. Wallace sent his conclusions to Darwin. Darwin published them along with his own and then started to write a decisive book for the purpose of demonstrating how one form of life may and does develop out of another. The scientific public was thus, in a way, prepared for the new doctrine but many great investigators resisted it strenu-



CHARLES DARWIN.

ously, although Darwin had only hinted at his conclusion, set forth twelve years later in his "Descent of Man," that the human race had developed by the same processes as lower animals. Resistance to his doctrines has not ceased even yet but they have nevertheless become an essential part of the mental outfit of civilized man. Where our predecessors of 100 or 150 years ago conceived of immutable laws, physical and moral, and of unchangeable species and institutions, the modern man thinks all the time of natural history and of human history as a continuous process of change and, according to popular belief which Darwin might not have approved, of steady advance. This readiness to accept change, improvement, experiment as natural, to regard political, religious and philosophical systems as right for their day and generation but not necessarily perpetual, was the social outcome of Darwin's solitary reflections in the cabin of the "Beagle," among the Andean wastes and as he studied the earthworms on the lawn of his Kentish home at Downe.