Life and Letters of Charles Darwin — Volume 1

Charles Darwin

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Produced by Sue Asscher

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF CHARLES DARWIN

By Charles Darwin

Including An Autobiographical Chapter

Edited By His Son Francis Darwin

VOLUME I

PREFACE

In choosing letters for publication I have been largely guided by the wish to illustrate my father's personal character. But his life was so essentially one of work, that a history of the man could not be written without following closely the career of the author. Thus it comes about that the chief part of the book falls into chapters whose titles correspond to the names of his books.

In arranging the letters I have adhered as far as possible to chronological sequence, but the character and variety of his researches make a strictly chronological order an impossibility. It was his habit to work more or less simultaneously at several subjects. Experimental work was often carried on as a refreshment or variety, while books entailing reasoning and the marshalling of large bodies of facts were being written. Moreover, many of his researches were allowed to drop, and only resumed after an interval of years. Thus a rigidly chronological series of letters would present a patchwork of

subjects, each of which would be difficult to follow. The Table of Contents will show in what way I have attempted to avoid this result.

In printing the letters I have followed (except in a few cases) the usual plan of indicating the existence of omissions or insertions. My father's letters give frequent evidence of having been written when he was tired or hurried, and they bear the marks of this circumstance. In writing to a friend, or to one of his family, he frequently omitted the articles: these have been inserted without the usual indications, except in a few instances, where it is of special interest to preserve intact the hurried character of the letter. Other small words, such as "of", "to", etc., have been inserted usually within brackets. I have not followed the originals as regards the spelling of names, the use of capitals, or in the matter of punctuation. My father underlined many words in his letters; these have not always been given in italics,--a rendering which would unfairly exaggerate their effect.

The Diary or Pocket-book, from which quotations occur in the following pages, has been of value as supplying a frame-work of facts round which letters may be grouped. It is unfortunately written with great brevity, the history of a year being compressed into a page or less; and contains little more than the dates of the principal events of his life, together with entries as to his work, and as to the duration of his more serious illnesses. He rarely dated his letters, so that but for the Diary it would have been all but impossible to unravel the history of his books. It has also enabled me to assign dates to many letters which would otherwise have been shorn of half their value.

Of letters addressed to my father I have not made much use. It was his custom to file all letters received, and when his slender stock of

files ("spits" as he called them) was exhausted, he would burn the letters of several years, in order that he might make use of the liberated "spits." This process, carried on for years, destroyed nearly all letters received before 1862. After that date he was persuaded to keep the more interesting letters, and these are preserved in an accessible form.

I have attempted to give, in Chapter III., some account of his manner of working. During the last eight years of his life I acted as his assistant, and thus had an opportunity of knowing something of his habits and methods.

I have received much help from my friends in the course of my work. To some I am indebted for reminiscences of my father, to others for information, criticisms, and advice. To all these kind coadjutors I gladly acknowledge my indebtedness. The names of some occur in connection with their contributions, but I do not name those to whom I am indebted for criticisms or corrections, because I should wish to bear alone the load of my short-comings, rather than to let any of it fall on those who have done their best to lighten it.

It will be seen how largely I am indebted to Sir Joseph Hooker for the means of illustrating my father's life. The readers of these pages will, I think, be grateful to Sir Joseph for the care with which he has preserved his valuable collection of letters, and I should wish to add my acknowledgment of the generosity with which he has placed it at my disposal, and for the kindly encouragement given throughout my work.

To Mr. Huxley I owe a debt of thanks, not only for much kind help, but for his willing compliance with my request that he should

contribute a chapter on the reception of the 'Origin of Species.'

Finally, it is a pleasure to acknowledge the courtesy of the publishers of the 'Century Magazine' who have freely given me the use of their illustrations. To Messrs. Maull and Fox and Messrs. Elliott and Fry I am also indebted for their kindness in allowing me the use of reproductions of their photographs.

FRANCIS DARWIN.

Cambridge, October, 1887.

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LIFE AND LETTERS OF CHARLES DARWIN.

VOLUME I.

CHAPTER 1.I. -- THE DARWIN FAMILY.

The earliest records of the family show the Darwins to have been substantial yeomen residing on the northern borders of Lincolnshire, close to Yorkshire. The name is now very unusual in England, but I believe that it is not unknown in the neighbourhood of Sheffield and in Lancashire. Down to the year 1600 we find the name spelt in a variety of ways--Derwent, Darwen, Darwynne, etc. It is possible, therefore, that the family migrated at some unknown date from Yorkshire, Cumberland, or Derbyshire, where Derwent occurs as the name of a river.

The first ancestor of whom we know was one William Darwin, who lived, about the year 1500, at Marton, near Gainsborough. His great grandson, Richard Darwyn, inherited land at Marton and elsewhere, and in his will, dated 1584, "bequeathed the sum of 3s. 4d. towards the settynge up of the Queene's Majestie's armes over the quearie (choir) doore in the parishe churche of Marton." (We owe a knowledge of these earlier members of the family to researches amongst the wills at Lincoln, made by the well-known genealogist, Colonel Chester.)

The son of this Richard, named William Darwin, and described as "gentleman," appears to have been a successful man. Whilst retaining his ancestral land at Marton, he acquired through his wife and by purchase an estate at Cleatham, in the parish of Manton, near Kirton Lindsey, and fixed his residence there. This estate remained in the family down to the year 1760. A cottage with thick walls, some fish-ponds and old trees, now alone show where the "Old Hall" once stood, and a field is still locally known as the "Darwin Charity," from being subject to a charge in favour of the poor of Marton. William Darwin must, at least in part, have owed his rise in station to his appointment in 1613 by James I. to the post of Yeoman of the Royal Armoury of Greenwich. The office appears to have been worth only 33 pounds a year, and the duties were probably almost nominal; he held the post down to his death during the Civil Wars.

The fact that this William was a royal servant may explain why his son, also named William, served when almost a boy for the King, as "Captain-Lieutenant" in Sir William Pelham's troop of horse. On the partial dispersion of the royal armies, and the retreat of the remainder to Scotland, the boy's estates were sequestrated by the Parliament, but

they were redeemed on his signing the Solemn League and Covenant, and on his paying a fine which must have struck his finances severely; for in a petition to Charles II. he speaks of his almost utter ruin from having adhered to the royal cause.

During the Commonwealth, William Darwin became a barrister of Lincoln's Inn, and this circumstance probably led to his marriage with the daughter of Erasmus Earle, serjeant-at-law; hence his great-grandson, Erasmus Darwin, the Poet, derived his Christian name. He ultimately became Recorder of the city of Lincoln.

The eldest son of the Recorder, again called William, was born in 1655, and married the heiress of Robert Waring, a member of a good Staffordshire family. This lady inherited from the family of Lassells, or Lascelles, the manor and hall of Elston, near Newark, which has remained ever since in the family. (Captain Lassells, or Lascelles, of Elston was military secretary to Monk, Duke of Albemarle, during the Civil Wars. A large volume of account books, countersigned in many places by Monk, are now in the possession of my cousin Francis Darwin. The accounts might possibly prove of interest to the antiquarian or historian. A portrait of Captain Lassells in armour, although used at one time as an archery-target by some small boys of our name, was not irretrievably ruined.) A portrait of this William Darwin at Elston shows him as a good-looking young man in a full-bottomed wig.

This third William had two sons, William, and Robert who was educated as a barrister. The Cleatham property was left to William, but on the termination of his line in daughters reverted to the younger brother, who had received Elston. On his mother's death Robert gave

up his profession and resided ever afterwards at Elston Hall. Of this Robert, Charles Darwin writes (What follows is quoted from Charles Darwin's biography of his grandfather, forming the preliminary notice to Ernst Krause's interesting essay, 'Erasmus Darwin,' London, 1879, page 4.):--

"He seems to have had some taste for science, for he was an early member of the well-known Spalding Club; and the celebrated antiquary Dr. Stukeley, in 'An Account of the almost entire Sceleton of a large Animal,' etc., published in the 'Philosophical Transactions,' April and May 1719, begins the paper as follows: 'Having an account from my friend Robert Darwin, Esq., of Lincoln's Inn, a person of curiosity, of a human sceleton impressed in stone, found lately by the rector of Elston,' etc. Stukeley then speaks of it as a great rarity, 'the like whereof has not been observed before in this island to my knowledge.' Judging from a sort of litany written by Robert, and handed down in the family, he was a strong advocate of temperance, which his son ever afterwards so strongly advocated:--

From a morning that doth shine,
From a boy that drinketh wine,
From a wife that talketh Latine,
Good Lord deliver me!

"It is suspected that the third line may be accounted for by his wife, the mother of Erasmus, having been a very learned lady. The eldest son of Robert, christened Robert Waring, succeeded to the estate of Elston, and died there at the age of ninety-two, a bachelor. He had a strong taste for poetry, like his youngest brother Erasmus. Robert also cultivated botany, and, when an oldish man, he published his

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