



S. 170

**DARWIN
MISUNDERSTOOD**

Darwin Misunderstood

Charles Darwin, the Fragmentary Man

By Geoffrey West. Pp. xiii + 351 + 8 plates.

(London : George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1937.)

15s. net.

THE author has evidently spent much time and labour in writing this life of Charles Darwin and presenting it in a moderate-sized volume of 351 pages, printed in a type pleasant to read, with eight illustrations, including three of Darwin (in 1840, 1854 and 1881), one of his wife and three of his ancestors. The list of "works quoted or otherwise utilised" on pages 333-342 is an indication of the ground which was traversed in its preparation, with the fruitful results shown in the excellent choice of significant passages for quotation.

The most unfortunate feature of the book is the word "fragmentary", given prominence in the title but only fully explained at the end, where on page 329 we read—"Werner Sombart has written of 'the fragmentary man' who is the type of the capitalist executive, seeing all in acquisitive terms, subordinating the whole to the part, making the quantitative aspect the total consideration till 'all else within him dries up' and 'everything about him becomes a wilderness, all life dies, all values disappear'." The author then proceeds to his preposterous conclusion: "The resemblance of this 'fragmentary man' to Darwin is evident. The business man lives for the acquisition of wealth; the Darwinian scientist for the acquisition of knowledge—each irrespective of human consequence."

— Nothing in truth could be more unlike the Darwin of whom we know so much and feel that we love, than the type described in Sombart's embittered words—the Darwin who "for nearly forty years . . . never knew one day of the health of ordinary men", and yet in the hours

712
spared from his scientific researches, had pleasant relationships with his poorer neighbours, taking an interest in their welfare, helping to found a friendly club and acting as its treasurer for thirty years, "keeping its accounts with minute and scrupulous exactness", and explaining the position to its members on Whit-Mondays when he received them in the garden. His friend the vicar wrote of him that in all parish matters he was an active assistant and that his liberal contributions were ever ready. Darwin also acted for some years as a county magistrate, and Major Leonard Darwin informs me that it was during the drive from one of the meetings that the creative thought upon divergence of character suddenly flashed into his mind.

In his "Memories of Down House"* , Major Darwin recalled with especial vividness a walk with his father and sister in a secluded valley beyond the "Sand Walk" at Down House, and how his father, moved by the peaceful beauty of the scene, said "that if he had to live his life over again he would make it a rule to let no day pass without reading a few lines of poetry", quietly adding that he wished he had "not let his mind go to rot so". On this Major Darwin wrote, recording his "firm conviction—a conviction which certainly was shared by all my brothers and sisters—that not only did my father thus give a decidedly erroneous impression of the changes which had taken place in his mind, but that the passages in his autobiography dealing with this subject have been constantly misunderstood and misinterpreted in the Press".

It is right to point out—and I am glad to emphasize it—that the author, again and again throughout the volume, creates an impression of Darwin which is entirely inconsistent with the "fragmentary man" described on page 329, and it is to be hoped that in any future issues the word and its definition will be omitted.

The conclusion conveyed on pages 121, 168 and 276, that Darwin was afraid of his father and

* "Nineteenth Century," July 1929, pp. 118-123. An attempt to explain the misunderstanding referred to in this paragraph was made by the present writer in "Darwin and the 'Origin'", London, 1909, p. 59-66, 79-83, 256-8.

treated him with an exaggerated deference, is not supported by the memories, written about 1877 or 1878, and quoted in the "Life and Letters"†—still less by the preceding paragraphs in which his son Francis records that "Charles Darwin had the strongest feeling of love and respect for his father's memory"; also—"his reverence for him was boundless and most touching"; and his daughter, Mrs. Lichfield, "describes him as saying with the most tender respect, 'I think my father was a little unjust to me when I was young, but afterwards I am thankful to think I became a prime favourite'." She had "a vivid recollection of the expression of happy reverie that accompanied these words, as if he were reviewing the whole relation, and the remembrance left a deep sense of peace and gratitude".

I am indebted to Major Leonard Darwin for the permission to quote the following words from a letter of November 12, 1937: "My memory of my father's attitude to his father was most certainly that he felt the strongest affection and indeed reverence for him. I myself do not remember a hint of any feeling that his father had been 'a little unjust' to him, as stated in my sister's excellent words on the situation." Also, referring to the author's words on page 168 about the purchase of a suitable property and Darwin's "diffidence towards his father in money matters", Major Darwin wrote: "At that date my father could hardly have earned enough to cover his expenses for a month, and all the capital expenditure on Down House must have come from the long and arduous labours of his father. Was it in any way surprising that he wanted to have a say in the matter?" It should be added that Darwin's only living son enjoyed reading the book, and fully appreciates the truthful picture of the exceptionally happy home at Down House.

In addition to the serious mistakes which have been here corrected, a few minor errors were noted: "draw" for drawn (p. xii), Christ Church "College"

† Vol. 1; pp. 11-20.

(p. 14), Floreat "Entomologie" (71), "Maderia" (96), "Arachnidæ" (196). F. W. Hope was not the "first Professor of Zoology at Oxford" (71), but founded the chair and nominated J. O. Westwood as its first occupant. It is also to be hoped that the words in which Fitzroy's suicide is described on p. 110 will be modified.

In conclusion, I am anxious to state my belief that the author has done valuable work which will bring comfort to many readers by giving them in a book of moderate size so complete an account of the life of Charles Darwin. E. B. POULTON.



