

# Books

## *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*

Edited by Nora Barlow

Harcourt, Brace . . . . . \$4.50

Reviewed by A. H. Sturtevant

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin, and the 100th anniversary of the publication of *The Origin of Species*. It is therefore not surprising that there are many recent publications of Darwiniana. Of these, the most important is the complete text of his autobiography, edited by his granddaughter Nora Barlow. In the same volume is other new material, to be noted below.

The *Origin* is one of the major contributions to the development of human thought. The hypothesis of evolution had been suggested many times before; but with this work it became a part of the main stream of culture, for Darwin here presented an overwhelming body of evidence — and the establishment of the principle of natural selection not only took the mystery out of evolution, but also gave a naturalistic interpretation for the adaptations of living organisms. This was the death blow to a teleological interpretation of biology, and to Paley's "argument from design."

There can be few men, among those who have made major contributions to human thought, about whom there is as much personal information available as there is about Darwin.

His career was largely determined by his trip as naturalist on the *Beagle* (1831-1836), and for this period there is an unusually full record, from which can be traced his gradual development. During the voyage Darwin kept a series of notebooks, which were then worked over into a diary; the formal account that he published (*Journal of Researches*) was then revised from the diary. Lady Barlow, who is herself a biologist, has previously edited and published a series of extracts from the notebooks (*Charles Darwin and the Voyage of the Beagle*, 1946), and the diary (*The Beagle Diary*, 1933). She is an outstanding authority on Darwin, and her notes

and discussions in the present volume add greatly to its value.

In 1887 Charles Darwin's son Francis published his father's *Life and Letters*, which included a brief autobiography written by Charles for his children and finished in 1876, six years before his death. Some passages in the autobiography were omitted, after much family discussion, and these are now published in the book under review. The new material chiefly concerns Darwin's religious beliefs. He had at one time intended to become a clergyman, but this plan gradually faded out of existence — chiefly during the voyage of the *Beagle*. In later years he became an agnostic, but not a militant one — in fact it is only now possible to see just what his attitude toward religion was.

### *Other contributions*

The fact of evolution and the fact that it, and the general occurrence of adaptations, can be explained without recourse to design or to any supernatural control, is of major importance. It is, perhaps, not surprising that many biologists have concluded that the details are also of major importance. Clearly, the precise family trees of particular groups of organisms are worth studying, as is the working out of the bearing of the newer knowledge of heredity on the mechanism of evolution. But it is arguable that biology has suffered from an overemphasis on evolution since Darwin's time. In this connection it is worth pointing out that Darwin himself made many first-rate contributions that were only rather remotely related to organic evolution — such as his studies on coral reefs, on earthworms, on the fertilization of plants by insects, on insectivorous plants, on the light-reactions of plants, and numerous other topics.

The present volume also has a discussion of Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, and of his influence on Charles. Samuel Butler felt that Charles Darwin had been unfair to him, and Lady Barlow discusses this matter at some length, producing new

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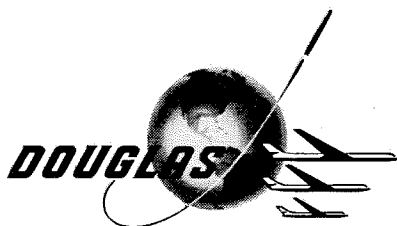
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material — and incidentally giving a picture of one side of Butler's character.

The autobiography itself is one of the few in which the author succeeds in being reasonably objective about himself, which makes it especially valuable to anyone interested in the history of ideas. It is also of value for the light it throws on the intellectual life of the times. There are brief accounts of Darwin's many scientific friends — Lyell, Hooker, Huxley, Wallace, and others — and also of Herbert Spencer, Grote, Carlyle, Macauley, and other contemporaries.

Above all, it is readable. Here is a first-rate mind — and a man who writes about himself with no reservations, and with no attempt either to show his own importance or to be overmodest.

*A. H. Sturtevant has been at Caltech since the division of biology was established in 1928. He has been Thomas Hunt Morgan Professor of Genetics since 1951.*

### *God Bless Our Queer Old Dean*

by W. Storrs Lee

G. P. Putnam's Sons, N.Y. . . . \$3.95

Reviewed by Foster Strong

As with many of Shaw's plays, the preface of this book may receive more concentrated attention from the reader than will the remainder of the volume. This preface, by Robert M. Strozier, now president of Florida State University but formerly dean of students at the University of Chicago, is a thoughtful and well-written discussion of the historical development of the office of dean of students, and a cogent review, by a perceptive reporter, of the operational headaches and the administrative uncertainties that beset the office in many institutions. (For the alumni who never became well acquainted with the deans' office at CIT, I hasten to assure them that the headaches and difficulties cited by Dr. Strozier are not characteristic of their alma mater.)

Most of Dean Lee's ten chapters and approximately 200 pages sound like those "as told to" reminiscences

so popular in magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post*. In addition to his own experiences (he served as dean of men at Middlebury College for ten years) Dean Lee must have attended most of the deans' conventions in that time and assiduously collected the experiences of other deans.

His book contains all of the standard episodes, and lists many of the standard gambits in deanmanship, and perhaps this is acceptable — after all, a reader who deliberately chooses to pick up a book about deans should expect such a catalog.

What is less defensible, however, is the characteristic exaggeration of the "as told to" method; all of the abnormal, or emergency, episodes (only one or two of which may possibly occur in an average dean year) have been gathered together in an apparent time sequence as if they represented a normal operating day. This is inaccurate; what is more, it makes a dean's life sound unbelievably frenetic, and one is bound to wonder if a dean who permitted such a life weren't downright soft in the head.

Any reviewer should bear in mind the audience to which a book is addressed. I am unable to meet this responsibility, because I have not been able to guess who the audience might be for this book.

I doubt that many deans will buy the book — they're just not that interested in looking in a distorted mirror.

Some parents of college students may buy the book — and I hope this will not result in forever shutting off future communication between parent and dean.

Some college presidents may read it out of curiosity — and I would expect them to feel on familiar ground in the preface, to read with interest the brief discussion of the ideological schism between the academically-based, father-substitute, old-line dean and the burgeoning ranks of the "personnel" counselors who have been trained to substitute psychological clichés for depth in human relations, and to skip rapidly over the anecdotal chatter that constitutes the major part of the book.

*Foster Strong has been Caltech's dean of freshmen since 1945.*