

RECORD: Conway, M. D. 1882. [Obituary] A great naturalist. *Wrexham Advertiser* (6 May), p. 2.

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Two Sundays ago many preachers in London were occupied in discoursing of the life and work of a great man, whom ten years ago I have heard denounced from the same pulpits. At Westminster Abbey, and in St. Paul's Cathedral, the simple life, the earnest work and remarkable conclusions of Charles Darwin, were the theme of the morning sermons, and Canon Liddon acknowledged that the theory of evolution as propounded and proved by his great naturalist must now be accepted by all intelligent thinkers, and was not in any way irreconcilable with Christian doctrine. I heard this subject lucidly and charmingly spoken of in a place of worship supposed to be unorthodox, but presenting as it did to my mind old truths, in a new form, made an impression I shall not soon forget. Meditation on the text which adorns the wall above the busts of great men who have passed away as in itself a mental tonic for the week's work.

"To thine own self be true; and it shall follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

It was St. George's Day, and the birthday of the great English Poet who wrote these words, when I sat listening to the Anglo-American preacher, Moncure Conway, as he told us of Charles Darwin's home, his parentage, and his investigations into nature's laws. Of how few workers or thinkers in any region of science can it be said, when their life is over, that to the last of their work and conclusions remained satisfactory to themselves, and that they never had to recall or to unsay what they had once given to the world. Yet so it was with Darwin, who lived to the age of 74 years, and died after illustrating what Emerson says of the uses of great men, that "they convert the raw material of thought into something for human use." Emerson, too, has just gone to swell the list of the great departed. All the forces and powers of nature work mainly in noiseless fashion, quietly and resistlessly effecting marvellous changes. The dropping of water on a rock, the building up of the coral reefs at the bottom of the sea by the tiny zoophyte, or the formation of vegetable mould which covers the earth's surface by the despised earth worm, are instances of the great law of Nature on which Darwin insisted, "a continually recurrent cause," and to which he attributed such great results.

The first paper Darwin ever published and in his early life was on the "Formation of Vegetable Mould," and his last work was the well known volume on the "Action and Habits of

Earthworms." I remarked to a thinkers on these matters this curious coincidence, and he suggested in reverent tones, "So it is in nature, which he loved, we see the same colours repeated in the sunset that we see in the sunrise, but intensified and perfected!"

I hoped that the little churchyard in Kent, near the home where he had lived so many years, would have been the last resting place of this much-loved searcher after truth, and I think no one would have been more surprised than himself to have realised the reaction in ecclesiastical and public feeling which provided for him a grave in our great national mausoleum, Westminster Abbey.

I shall not soon forget that funeral, nor the thoughts and emotions to which it gave rise. Such a procession of men distinguished in the world of science can seldom be seen anywhere but under the portals of the Royal Society itself; and as with bowed heads they slowly followed the coffin of their great but simple-minded master through the aisles of the vaulted Abbey, a solemn reality seemed to attach to the words of the anthem chanted by the choir- "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom and getteth understanding."

We who occupied seats in the transepts were allowed to walk past the open grave when the coffin, covered with white flowers, had been lowered into it, and there close by the side of Sir Isaac Newton and Sir John Herschell, we felt as our hearts went with the subdued chant of the choristers,

His body is buried in peace, but his name liveth for evermore.

As we passed out of the sombre shadow of the Abbey into the sunshine and busy life of Westminster again, I thought how seldom is it that the truth of a discovery antagonistic to all existing prejudices, after long and vigorous opposition, is received and justified within twenty years; and the last honours of a nation bestowed upon the unpretentious but earnest discoverer.

Charles Robert Darwin was a typical naturalist and man of science, and his life and teachings are a heritage to those who follow in his steps.