

him to yield up his Christian faith, and even, in large measure, that common faith in a God which he shared not with Christians only but with all men of thought and feeling. A rare opportunity of this sort has been afforded us by the publication of the "*Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*," by his son, in which is incorporated a very remarkable passage, extracted from some autobiographical notes written by this great student of nature, as late as 1876, with the special purpose of tracing the history of his religious views. Certainly no one will hesitate to accord to him a calm hearing; and we cannot but be instructed by learning by what processes and under the pressure of what arguments so eminently thoughtful a mind was led to desert the faith in which he was bred, and gradually to assume a position towards the problem of the origin of the world which he can call by no more luminous name than that of Agnosticism.

The history of the drift by which Mr. Darwin was separated from faith in a divine order in the world, divides itself into two well-marked periods. The first of these, which was completed at about the time when he reached his fortieth year, ends with the loss of his Christianity. During the second, which extended over the remainder of his life, he struggled, with varying fortunes, but ever more and more hopelessly, to retain his standing at least as a theist. At the end of the first he no longer believed that God had ever spoken to men in His Word; at the end of the second he more than doubted whether the faintest whisper of His voice could be distinguished in His works. He was never prepared dogmatically to deny His existence; but search as he might he could not find Him, and he could only say that if He existed He was, verily, a God that hides himself.

Let us take up the matter in the orderly form which Mr. Darwin has himself given it, and inform ourselves seriously what were the objections to Christianity and the difficulties in the way of a reasoned theism which led him to such sad conclusions.

His account of his loss of Christianity takes the shape of a personal history. He gives us not so much an argument against Christianity as a record of the arguments which led him to discard it. These fall into two classes: in the first stands the single decisive argument that really determined his anti-Christian attitude; while in the second are gathered together the various supporting considerations which came flocking to buttress the conclusion when once it was attained. The palmary argument depends for its weight on a twofold peculiarity of his personal attitude. He had persuaded himself not only that species originated by a process of evolution, but also that this process was slow, long continued, and by a purely natural development. And he held, with dogmatic tenacity, the opinion that the Book of Genesis teaches that God created each species by a separate, sudden, and immediate fiat. If both these positions were sound, it followed necessarily that either his