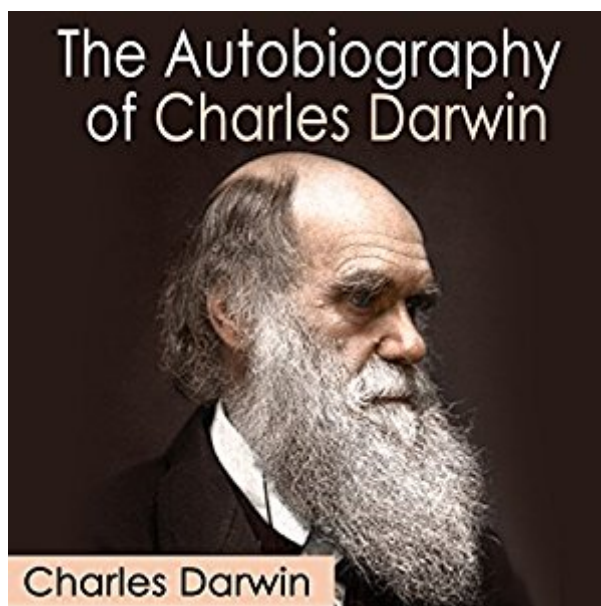


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The Autobiography Of Charles Darwin



Synopsis

A German Editor having written to me for an account of the development of my mind and character with some sketch of my autobiography, I have thought that the attempt would amuse me, and might possibly interest my children or their children. I know that it would have interested me greatly to have read even so short and dull a sketch of the mind of my grandfather, written by himself, and what he thought and did, and how he worked. I have attempted to write the following account of myself, as if I were a dead man in another world looking back at my own life. Nor have I found this difficult, for life is nearly over with me. I have taken no pains about my style of writing.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

although the "Look inside" feature of the book as presented showed chapter headings and a TOC there was none in the reset item I received. Smaller and worse print-type face and not even pagination! A rather cheap effort, but I trust all the relevant words are there. Sometimes the "feel" of the book gives it substance...I guess I got what I paid for ...cheap.I did not get what I had ordered, which was based on the look inside. Deceptive indeed.

This book is not what I ordered. This is an abridged version edited by Darwin's son Francis. I ordered the original version by his granddaughter Nora Barlow. To me, it's not worth the hassle to figure out how to correct this mistake.

The unexpurgated version of Charles Darwin's autobiography is an essential for anyone interested in the man. Darwin originally wrote this for his family, not for publication, and it is light on the thinking that went into his published works (after all, he explains, he said what he had to say in his books). Certainly, this volume cannot be used without other context. Janet Browne's definitive biography puts the autobiography in its context.

It is interesting to read the words of a man who still has such a large impact on the world today.

Reading the memoir that Darwin wrote for his family, two qualities of the man stand out above all others. The first is his intense humanity--indeed, his lovability. He is modestly self-deprecating in a totally uncalculating way; his devotion to his father, wife, and children shines through, as does his compassion for suffering animals; and his reminiscences of childhood, youth, and young adulthood are quaintly idiosyncratic (he doesn't remember and record "big" events so much as funny or curious little ones that lodged in his memory). He comes across as an incredibly decent guy. Second, he is a scrupulously honest thinker. He abandons his early Christianity (although he admits that he was never very fervent) because his understanding of natural selection rules out the possibility of a Paley-esque divine design in nature, and he rejects the idea of eternal damnation because it seems to him hideously unjust. (The bulk of his religious reflections are found in pp. 85-96.) He is devoted to the empirical method, carefully collecting and collating years and years worth of data before drawing conclusions from them. He especially notes, he tells us, data that seem to run contrary to his hypotheses, because he knows how easy it is to "forget" such inconvenient facts. And he takes great delight in his scientific work. Curious that Darwin laments on at least two occasions that he's lost his youthful taste for poetry, art, and music. His love of the natural world surely is as artistic as scientific. I highly recommend this autobiography to all persons interested in the on-going fracas over evolution. It goes a long way to revealing the real man too often demonized by polemicists.

I had bought "The Autobiography of Charles Darwin" edited by his son Francis. I wanted to read about his life journey from studying to become a clergyman, to his theory of evolution by natural selection. It wasn't there, I found it hard to believe that he would write his autobiography, and leave it out. It wasn't until I found his autobiography edited by his granddaughter that I found out his son left out anything directed to family, comments about some of his colleagues and his thoughts about religion. This book has it all. I highly recommend it.

Charles Darwin is one of the most influential persons in the past two hundred years. His theories have had major repercussions for science, as well as for our historical and religious understanding of ourselves. If you want to begin understand the mind of Darwin (but not his theory of natural selection - read "Origin" for that of course), read this book. It contains the unexpurgated reflective autobiography of Darwin, and it will be a good window into his ideas and thoughts, though I hope you do not stop there. Read more of Darwin. Unsure of his direction early in life, Charles Darwin became a scientific stickler for accurate details, and of course the monumental founder of the idea of natural selection. Darwin's religious notions, some of his biography, as well as the (almost comic) table of "proofs" whether to marry or not show a serious and light-hearted side to this complex man. Only regrets - I wish there were more information contained herein, and that the latter part of it was better organized (or that it had less to do with the tedious Samuel Butler dispute).

This is a wonderful book. It provides an insightful view of Darwin himself, with only light reference to his revelations about nature and evolution. By reading this book, one learns that Darwin was not the dark, confrontational, angry person religious people try to portray him (they are projecting, I think). Rather, Charles Darwin was a man full of life, wonderment, and humor. He was a very sociable humanitarian who cherished his family, children (10!), and associates. Most of all, he had an insatiable thirst for knowledge about nature, and was a complete devotee to the scientific method. His contribution to our understanding of biology is, of course, historic, but he was also a central figure in the immediate functions of the scientific community of his day. His work lead to the realization that religion is myth, but he does not dwell on this, but mentions it in passing. Instead, he writes about the beauty of the diversity and functionality of nature and how Natural Selection has provided such a rich environment.

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