

Darwin & Digestion

This week we move from the greenhouse and the study to the kitchen and dining room of Down House in preparation for our own Darwinian feast! Darwin was famous as an invalid during his own lifetime, and as Janet Browne notes in the article we read for this week, his ill health was not unconnected from his public working life, but rather deeply intertwined in some important ways. If we are to understand Darwin as an influential intellectual, it is worth understanding his intestines and indigestion as well!

Darwin was preoccupied with his health, and particularly his intestines, over the course of his adult life. In his letters to family and friends, he was not afraid to be explicit about his symptoms and discomfort. From his *Beagle* days to his death, the state of his health is a constant theme running through his correspondence. It was also a matter of continual concern and interest among his family, and examining Darwin's ill health is an opportunity for us to broaden the scope of our interaction with his correspondence. Letters not only written to or from Darwin himself, but also those exchanged between his wife and children, are rife with references to his health. This correspondence is fascinating for the glimpse it provides of the bright and engaging personalities of the Darwin children, and of family life in the Victorian era more generally.

Letters

Letter 259—Charles Darwin to Caroline Darwin, 13 October 1834

Darwin's ill health began on his *Beagle* voyage. Amidst the excitement of South American cities, cultures, geography, flora and fauna, he complains to his sister Caroline of the effects of some sour wine on his physical state, and the difficulties of traveling on horseback while ill.

Letter 465—Emma Wedgwood (Emma Darwin) to Charles Darwin, [30 December 1838]

In this letter, written prior to their marriage, Emma expresses her concern for Darwin's health, her sympathy for the frustration he feels when his symptoms impinge on his ability to work, and her express desire that he not be a "holiday husband...always making himself agreeable" for her sake.

Letter 3626—Emma Darwin to T. G. Appleton, 28 June [1862]

Here Emma writes on her husband's behalf to his American publisher, T. G. Appleton. Darwin, who is too ill to write himself, wishes to thank Appleton for gifts sent from America.

Letter 3597—Darwin to Joseph Dalton Hooker, 11 June [1862]

Among bits of family news and botanical information, Darwin remarks with humor on the difficulties of finding a suitable cook.

Emma Darwin to Henrietta Darwin, [4 November 1863]

In this brief note to her daughter Henrietta, Emma describes a recent consultation with a new doctor at Down, who prescribed cod liver oil and moderate work, among other things, for Darwin's complaints.

Emma Darwin to Henrietta Darwin, [14 April 1867]

Emma debates the wisdom of making a visit to her relatives while Charles suffered a bout of "rocking & giddiness."

Emma Darwin to Henrietta Darwin, [5 September 1868]

In this chatty letter to her daughter, who was travelling in the south of France at the time, Emma describes in some detail typical 19th-century luncheon fare.

Letter 8296—Darwin to Francis Galton, 21 April [1872]

In this letter to his cousin Francis Galton, the well known eugenicist, Darwin encourages him to carry out his investigation of spiritualism, but regrets that his own ill health prevents him from visiting the Scottish medium, Daniel Dunglass Home, with Galton.

Emma Darwin to Henrietta Darwin, [4 December 1873]

Here Emma describes Darwin's difficulties with one of his many attending physicians. Charles has taken to "Doctoring himself" in an attempt to improve his digestion, and is "absolutely gloating over puddings[.]"

Leonard Darwin to George Darwin, 8 February [1878]

Darwin's youngest son Lenny writes from Down house to his older brother George, then at Cambridge as a mathematics professor) a letter full of news about the political and military state of affairs in Europe at the time (Lenny was an engineer with the British Royal Corps.). Among geopolitics and discussion of his own aches and pains, Lenny reports on their father's health, noting that Darwin's frustration with his botanical experiments took a toll on his wellbeing.

Letter 259 Darwin to C. S. Darwin

13 Oct 1834

Valparaiso.

October 13th. 1834.

My dear Caroline

I have been unwell & in bed for the last fortnight, & am now only able to sit up for a short time. As I want occupation I will try & fill this letter.— Returning from my excursion into the country I staid a few days at some Goldmines & whilst there I drank some Chichi a very weak, sour new made wine, this half poisoned me, I staid till I thought I was well; but my first days ride, which was a long one again disordered my stomach, & afterwards I could not get well; I quite lost my appetite & became very weak. I had a long distance to travel & I suffered very much; at last I arrived here quite exhausted. But Bynoe with a good deal of Calomel & rest has nearly put me right again & I am now only a little feeble.— I consider myself very lucky in having reached this place, without having tried it, I should have thought it not possible; a man has a great deal more strength in him, when he is unwell, than he is aware of. If it had not been for this accident, my ride would have been very pleasant. I made a circuit, taking in St Iago. I set out by the valley of Aconcagua I had some capital scrambling about the mountains. I slept two nights near the summit of the Bell of Quillota. This is the highest mountain out of the chain of the Andes, being 4700 ft high.^{f1} The view was very interesting, as it afforded a complete map of the Cordilleras & Chili.— From here I paid a visit to a Cornish miner who is working some mines in a ravine in the very Andes. I thoroughly enjoyed rambling about, hammer in hand, the bases of these great giants, as independently as I would the mountains in Wales. I reached the Snow but found it quite impossible to penetrate any higher.— I now struck down to the South, to St Iago the gay Capital of Chili.— I spent a very pleasant week there, receiving unbounded hospitality from the few English merchants who reside there.— Corfield was there also & we lived together at an inn.— St Iago is built on a plain; the basin of a former inland sea; the perfect levelness of this plain is contrasted in a strange & picturesque manner with great, snow topped mountains, which surround it.— From St Iago I proceeded to S. Fernando about 40 leagues to the South.— Every one in the city talked so much about the robbers & murderers, I was persuaded to take another man with me, this added very much to the expense; & now I do not think it was necessary. Altogether it has been the most expensive excursion, I ever made, & in return I have seen scarcely enough of the Geology to repay it.— I was however lucky in getting a good many fossil shells from the modern formation of Chili.—

On my road to S. Fernando, I had some more hammering at the Andes, as I staid a few days at the hot springs of Cauquenes, situated in one of the valleys.— From S. Fernando I cut across the country to the coast & then returned, as I have said very miserable to Corfields house here at Valparaiso. You will be sorry to hear, the Schooner, the Adventure is sold; the Captain received no sort of encouragement from the Admiralty & he found the expense <of> so large a vessel so immense he determined at once to <give> her up.—^{f2} We are now in the same state as when we left England with Wickham for 1st Lieut, which part of the business anyhow is a good job.— we shall all be very badly off for room; & I shall have trouble enough with stowing my collections. It is in every point of view a grievous affair in our little world; a sad tumbling down for some of the officers, from 1st. Lieut of the Schooner to the miserable midshipmans birth. —& many similar degradations.— It is necessary also to leave our little painter, Martens, to wander about ye world.—^{f3} Thank Heavens, however, the Captain positively asserts that this change shall not prolong the voyage.—that in less than 2 years we shall be at New S. Wales.—

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I find being sick at stomach inclines one also to be home-sick. In about a fortnight the Beagle proceeds down the coast, touches at Concepcion & Valdivia & sets to work behind Chiloe. I suspect we shall pay T del Fuego another visit; but of this good Lord deliver us: it is kept very secret, lest the men should desert; every one so hates the confounded country. Our voyage sounded much more delightful in the instructions, than it really is; in fact it is a survey of S. America, & return by the C. of Good Hope instead of C. Horn. We shall see nothing of any country, excepting S. America. But I ought not to grumble, for the voyage is for this very reason, I believe, much better for my pursuits, although not nearly so agreeable as a tour.— I will write again before sailing. I am however at present deeply in debt with letters. I received shortly since a very kind long one from Mr Owen, which I will shortly answer.— Letter writing is a task, which I thoroughly dislike.— I do not mean writing to home: but to any body else, for really after such interval I have nothing to tell but my own history, & that is very tedious.—

I have picked up one very odd correspondent, it is Mr Fox the Minister at Rio. (it is the Mr Fox, who in one of Lord Byrons letters is said to be so altered after an illness that his *oldest Creditors* would not know him)

I forgot to thank Susan for her letter of May & Catherine for her pithy message “We do not write” because Mr Owen does.— I must previously have acknowledged your long letter for the foregoing month.—

We are all here in great anxiety to hear some political news. A Ship sailed from Liverpool just after Ld Greys resignation & we cannot guess who will succeed him.—[f4](#)

Give my best love to my Father & all of you & Believe me my very dear Caroline |
Yours affectionately | Charles Darwin.—

Footnotes

[f1](#) Robert FitzRoy in *Narrative Appendix*, p. 303 records the height as 6200 feet. CD changed his figure to 6400 feet in *Journal of researches*, p. 312.

[f2](#) In *Narrative 2*: 361–2, FitzRoy wrote: ‘At this time I was made to feel and endure a bitter disappointment; the mortification it caused preyed deeply, and the regret is still vivid. I found that it would be impossible for me to maintain the Adventure much longer: my own means had been taxed, even to involving myself in difficulties, and as the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty did not think it proper to give me any assistance, I saw that all my cherished hopes of examining many groups of islands in the Pacific, besides making a complete survey of the Chilian and Peruvian shores, must utterly fail. I had asked to be allowed to bear twenty additional seamen on the Beagle’s books, whose pay and provisions would then be provided by Government, being willing to defray every other expense myself; but even this was refused. As soon as my mind was made up, after a most painful struggle, I discharged the Adventure’s crew, took the officers back to the Beagle, and sold the vessel.’

[f3](#) ‘Mr Martens, the artist, has been obliged from want of room to leave the Beagle’ (*‘Beagle’ diary*, p. 249). Conrad Martens emigrated to Australia, where CD visited him in 1836.

[f4](#) Lord Melbourne succeeded Lord Grey.

Letter 465 Emma Darwin Wedgwood to Darwin
[30 Dec 1838]

Maer

Sunday

My dear Charles

I am rather ashamed of writing to you so soon again but if I disguise my writing in the direction I am in hopes the post master at Newcastle will think it is somebody else. I want to persuade you dear Charley to leave town at once & get some rest. You have looked so unwell for some time that I am afraid you will be laid up if you fight against it any longer. Do set off to Shrewsbury & get some doctering & then come here & be idle. I can't make up my mind to only a flying visit here & I shall be rather jealous if you stay longer at Shrewsbury than here & I am sure the Dr will think it highly contrary to the strictest etiquette so be a dear good boy. I am sure it must be very disagreeable & painful to you to feel so often cut off from the power of doing your work & I want you to cast out of your mind all anxiety about me on that point & to feel sure that nothing *could* make me so happy as to feel that I could be of any use or comfort to my own dear Charles when he is not well. If you knew how I long to be with you when you are not well! You must not think that I expect a holiday husband to be always making himself agreeable to me & if that is all the "worse" that I shall have it will not be much for me to bear Whatever it may for you. So don't be ill any more my dear Charley till I can be with you to nurse you & save you from bothers.

The weather these two days has been surprizingly warm & pleasant. I don't think I can send our own servants linen very soon as it is gone to be bleached but I will borrow enough for Margaret & send it this week. I don't know how we shall settle between the two cooks. I am going solemnly to consider wedding cake today. Don't you wish you could be married like a royal Prince without being at your own wedding? You may be allowed to carry a few pinches of snuff in your pocket for that morning only. I have no important news to tell you since yesterday morning & I will not write again these three or four days that's poz.

So Goodbye my dear Charley yours Em W.

Papa would be much obliged to you to buy him a respirator & if there is any improvement to get it of the newest fashion & desire it to be sent to Whitmore station by railroad

Letter 3626 Emma Darwin to T. G. Appleton

28 June [1862]

Down. | Bromley. | Kent. S.E.

June 28.

My dear Mr Appleton

It was very pleasant to find ourselves so kindly remembered by you at such a distance of time & Mr Darwin begs me to thank you most cordially for the beautiful book—^{f2} (He has not at all lost his taste for maple sugar any more than the children have).^{f3} I am writing for him as he is very unwell at present but he begs me to say that the book is one of the most beautiful specimens of works of Nat. History he has ever seen.

I wish we could have had the pleasure of seeing your brother here but Mr Darwin has been too unwell to see any visitors.^{f4}

We shall rejoice at the termination of the war & if we cannot hope to see Slavery abolished I think it must at all events be prevented from Spreading. If you shd be coming to England I hope you will let us know as we should be so glad to see you again. Mr Darwin begs to be remembered to you. He has the pleasantest recollection of the days you spent here^{f5}

very truly yours | E. Darwin

Footnotes

^{f1} The year is established by the reference to William Sumner Appleton's visit to Britain (see n. 4, below).

^{f2} The book referred to has not been identified. Appleton visited Down House in October 1849 in company with his sister, Mary, the wife of Emma Darwin's cousin, Robert Mackintosh (Emma Darwin's diary (DAR 242)).

^{f3} Appleton had sent a gift of maple sugar to the Darwin family (see letter from T. G. Appleton, 24 April [1862]).

^{f4} Appleton's half-brother, William Sumner Appleton, spent the summer of 1862 in Britain pursuing antiquarian and historical interests (see letter from T. G. Appleton, 24 April [1862]).

^{f5} See n. 2, above.

Letter 3597 Darwin, C. R. to Hooker, J. D.,

11 June [1862]

Down

June 11th

My dear Hooker

I was glad to see your handwriting this morning.^{f1} I am very sorry to hear an indifferent account of Mrs. Hooker:^{f2} I heard from Miss Pugh (who is here) that she was looking not well.^{f3} How kind Mrs. H. was to Miss Pugh, who by the way is charmed with your Charlie & has repeated to us some of his capital little speeches.^{f4} Emma is at Southampton with Horace (who has got *much* good from the change) but I have sent your message about trustworthy oldish cook;^{f5} I fear she cannot help. We might have recommended the very woman; but she is going to marry: I wish to Heaven Nat. Selection had produced “neuters”, who would not flirt or marry; I am sure that they would be as useful as neuter Bees. How the Exhibition works you!^{f6} I have had only a glance, & I was not well, & saw nothing, & was dispirited.^{f7} Any time that you are *actually* inclined to write, I shd. of course be eager to hear about Cameroons.—^{f8}

I wish you had time to discuss a little the mundane Glacial period: I still believe it will be the turning point of all recent Geographical distribution. But the case, as I have put it is infinitely weaker than if I had published all the direct evidence of glacial action.^{f9}

Did I tell you that pollen placed for 65 hours on the apparent (& I still think real) stigma of *Leschenaultia* had not protruded a vestige of a tube!! I won't be beaten & will get a plant.—^{f10}

Oliver, the omniscient, has sent me a paper in Bot. Zeitung with most accurate description of all that I saw in *Viola*.—^{f11}

I have had long letter from Asa Gray, (*with not one allusion to politicks*.(!)) about my orchid book:^{f12} he gives red-hot praise; & did I not know he would not write falsely, I shd. think he was humbugging me; but I am sure he is honest, & his kind sympathy has run away with him.—

Farewell my dear old friend. | C. D.

Footnotes

^{f1} Letter from J. D. Hooker, 9 June 1862.

^{f2} In his letter of 9 June 1862, Hooker had written of Frances Harriet Hooker: ‘My wife is very thin & watery, lacks energy, blood & muscle’.

^{f3} Miss Pugh had been governess at Down House between 1857 and 1859 (Emma Darwin's diary (DAR 242)); she was currently resident in Kew (see the letter from Emma Darwin to William Erasmus Darwin, [14 May 1862], in DAR 219.1: 56) and was thus a neighbour of the Hookers. According to Emma Darwin's diary (DAR 242), ‘Miss Pugh came to Down’ on 5 June 1862.

^{f4} CD also mentioned the Hookers' kindness to ‘poor Miss Pugh’ in the letter to J. D. Hooker, 9 May [1862]. Charles Paget Hooker, the Hookers' third child, was 7 years old.

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f5 See letter from J. D. Hooker, 9 June 1862. Emma and Horace Darwin were in Southampton from 3 to 12 June 1862 (Emma Darwin's diary (DAR 242); see also letter to W. E. Darwin, [31 May 1862] and n. 4). Horace had been unwell earlier in the year (see letters to W. E. Darwin, 14 February [1862] and 26 April [1862]).

f6 See letter from J. D. Hooker, 9 June 1862. CD refers to the International Exhibition, which opened in South Kensington, London, on 1 May 1862. Hooker was a member of the jury for class 4, section C, 'Vegetable substances used in manufactures, &c.', and an associate juror for class 3, section B, 'Drysaltory, grocery, and preparations of food as sold for consumption' (*Reports by the juries*).

f7 CD was in London from 6 to 9 May 1862 (Emma Darwin's diary (DAR 242)), and visited the International Exhibition on 8 May (see letter to W. E. Darwin, [8 May 1862]).

f8 See letter from J. D. Hooker, 9 June 1862 and n. 3.

f9 CD put forward his ideas about migration during a worldwide glacial period in explanation for current patterns of geographical distribution in *Origin*, pp. 365–82. Henry Walter Bates's assertion that there was no evidence for the extinction of indigenous butterfly species from the Amazon region during the glacial period, and that the differences between North and South American temperate species of some insect genera were too great to have occurred since the glacial period, had led CD to reconsider his arguments in relation to whether the glacial period had affected all parts of the globe simultaneously and whether equatorial regions had been affected at all. CD had discussed this question with Bates and Hooker when they visited Down House in April 1862 (see letter from H. W. Bates, 30 April 1862 and n. 3). However, Hooker's work on the flora of Cameroon and the islands off the coast of West Africa provided support for CD's view that temperate plants had migrated into tropical regions during the glacial period (see letter to J. D. Hooker, 9 May [1862] and n. 6).

f10 CD refers to his investigations into fertilisation in *Leschenaultia* (see letter to J. D. Hooker, [18 May 1862] and n. 2). CD's notes on the observation reported here, which are dated 2 June 1862, are preserved in DAR 265. See also *ML* 2: 257–63.

f11 Müller 1857. See letter to Daniel Oliver, [before 11 June 1862].

f12 See letter from Asa Gray, 18 May 1862. CD's allusion to politics refers to the strained correspondence between Gray and some of his English correspondents in the wake of the so-called 'Trent affair' (see letter from J. D. Hooker, [19 January 1862], letters to J. D. Hooker, 16 January [1862] and 25 [and 26] January [1862], and letter to Asa Gray, 22 January [1862]).

From Emma Darwin to H. E. Darwin

[4 November 1863]

Down | Bromley | Kent. S. E.

Wed

My dear Body

The Doctors both arrived at 6. & we like Dr B. a quiet grave man apparently sensible. He is very confident that the head symptoms were only sympathetic. He is going to give Papa loads of physic & the oddest thing is cod liver oil in very small quantities. But what rejoices Papa is that he thinks moderate work is much better for him than not. He has known people made ill something like Papa from leaving off all work. Papa stood it very well at the time but paid for it afterwards by a horrid night with pain in the bowels like he had in the spring. So he is in bed a good deal knocked up but the pain is gone. Oddly Horace was taken with sickness early in the morning, which may have been the late dinner tho' it was a very moderate one.

I am glad the glass has risen. so you will have a walk today.

Papa was unusually well all yesterday & Horace did not lie down once till the evening after the gents were gone.

Give my love to Aunt Fanny

From Emma Darwin to H. E. Darwin

[14 April 1867]

Down

Sunday

Dearest Hen—

I am very glad you are going to stay till Thursday & I dare say it will finish setting you up (how lovely it must be this morning. There is something quite peculiar in the beauty of the lime trees this year & I think it must be the early frosts). I think my plan of coming over may have made you fix to come home on Tuesday or Wed. so I will not obey any orders for those days notwithstanding any thing you may have written, but send to meet you on Thursday as before. I might still if I chose cross you on the road & go to L. H. P. ^{f1} on that day tho' I should be sorry to miss your first news, but I don't believe I shall go at all as Papa had such a very bad attack of rocking & giddiness last night that I shd have been very sorry to be away. He is poorly today. If eczema was to appear again I shd feel quite easy to leave him. It is quite gone now. Papa begs you will not spoil yr visit by working too hard as you are 2 ½ sheets before him & it will not signify if he does overtake you. ^{f2} I am very glad you get to feel more intimate. It is as well to like one's cousins or even one's Aunt. We will buy Peggy. I think she will turn out a safe investment but no very lively pleasure in riding. I suppose £30 not guineas. I will send a cheque when I hear.

Kitten is quite well. It turned out overloaded bowels which produced the worst of consequences but nothing fatal. I am starving her, but I cannot make her touch bread on anything but meat & a mouthful of milk. Sir John called yesterday but science talk.

Goodbye my dear | E. D.

This letter of Aunt F. is quite safe to shew Aunt C.

Footnotes

^{f1} Leith Hill Place, home of Darwin's sister Susan and her husband Josiah Wedgwood.

^{f2} Henrietta did a lot of substantive editing and proofing for her father. This probably refers to a revised edition of *On the Origin*.

From Emma Darwin to H. E. Darwin

[5 September 1868]

Dearest Body

I have just got yr letter which puts one in spirits from its spirit of enjoyment in spite of your cold. Goulet^{f1} sounds perfection. Well to return to journal. Wed. Lizzy & I, dropping Frank at the pools went thro' Holwood & called on Mrs B. C. & had a pleasant sit with her (She was seeming quite well tell El.) & heard about the Sat. scheme for Knoles. So we called at Keston on our way home to settle things. The little lady just coming from London so clean & pale & pretty not flushed & dusty as some of us wd have been. We staid a short time & were introduced to the mother who I thought very pretty.

Yesterday Papa went to lunch at Keston & came back charmed with them all, he thought he & the pretty lady wd never have done shaking hands. Goldwin Smith very agreeable which he had formerly not found him to be. The lunch was humble, I can't think why, to such a degree, as mutton chops can be cooked by the most ignorant. A few slices of cold veal & some raw cold mutton on the side board, not even potatoes. I was very glad he cd go. He felt done up having given Lett. a jobation for idleness which always disagrees. Lizzy & I meanwhile went to Ravensbourne to consult Alice about food, but Mrs B. C. & she were in town—so we trusted to our own genius & I am sure we have provided enough—chicken & ham elegantly cut up & in little packets. Nice little veal pies ditto separate so that every body gets a whole little package which does for a plate. Rolls—cake puffs & gingerbread. Lizzy deeply interested that every thing shd be right. A great job it was & they are just set out. Unluckily the spanking mare is a little damaged & so George has ridden the pony to Green St green & there hopes to get on the coach, if not they must squeeze him into the carriage—The boys have been riding & having a little croquet but it is almost too hot for that, & after dinner G. & Lizzy do almost an hour of Hermann & Dorothea.

Horace comes today. His letters have been few & dull but I am sure he must have enjoyed himself this lovely weather. A letter from Ed. to you which makes us think Jackdaw too precious to have; & he says he wd not like her to be ridden by a man. f. (stands for Papa) thinks it quite too dangerous to have him. The boys shooting is fallen through as the Langtons do not find it worth while to keep gamekeeper &c for so short a season as, with a longish visit at Gunby in Sep. & going abroad themselves in Oct, it wd be. (they wd want Goulet by the 20th in Paris if that wd do.). He also says Jackdaw rears at windmills ever so far off which wd be inconvenient in the this country. How odd my sending you a prose about the little Col. whom you saw. His dinner was good but not in proportion to his lunch. His breakfast I think was best of all—beefsteak, ham & finishing with an egg. J. did not think him worth knowing tho' nice. We packed him off early.

A letter from Mrs Cameron but not near so Cameronian as her notes used to be. You shall have it saved but it is 4 sheets & wd cost 10d & is not worth much. I have sent it to Uncle Ras & I shall again tell him to come, now it is hot & so many boys. I fancy he is not going to Rotha Bridge. A note to ask you to dine & meet "my Uncle and Aunt from Staff." again with Mrs Christy which of course I declined. Rose does not come as she wont leave Mabel who is going again to Miss Buob & much the wisest plan too. Poor old Duberry is not dead yet. Lizzy & I are going to undertake Woods but not Charley, who will do very well till you come home. It is wonderful how not troubling ones head about any thing in luggage &c saves fatigue. Whenever the family tour takes place you must have Goulet & no doubt she cd dress Lizzy's hair.

Anne loaded with smart caps for her m. is gone with Esther. I am afraid we shall lose her soon as she thinks employment is permanent. There never was such luck as your having another summer—Therm. 73 or so—

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Miss Norton said she expected to find all the English perfectly well & walking miles & miles. She is rather disappointed in both particulars.

Well Goodbye my dear we are very comf. & well | yours E. D.

my best love to El.

Sat morning still blazing & hot & such monlight evenings with the window open

Footnotes

[f1](#) Goulet was Henrietta's lady's maid.

Letter 8296 Darwin to Francis Galton, 21 April [1872]

I have considered your proposition well. It seems to me highly desirable that the subject shd. be investigated, & that it is a sort of duty in every one who can do so to aid.— I have consulted my wife, & she thinks even more strongly than I do, that it wd. be impossible for me.— It is very rare that I can converse with anyone & be in any way excited for an hour: my head then begins to rock, & all power of attention is lost. I am, also, so often too unwell to go out, that I shd. frequently break any appointment.— Moreover, odd as it may seem, an extreme desire to be well on any particular day, or rather evening, is very apt to make me bad.— I regret it much, but I dare not accept Mr. Home's remarkably liberal offer. Do not give up yourself.— Can you not get some man known for physical science to join you? If Mr Crooke succeeds in making his apparatus, & can get some instrument-maker to sell it, then everyone could buy one & try for himself— This would settle the question at once, whether any power does come out of the human body of certain or many individuals.— It wd. undoubtedly be a very grand discovery.—

With very sincere thanks for your letter | Yours very truly | Ch. Darwin

I regret my decision deeply, but I am sure it is unavoidable.— only those who live with me can know how strange a state I am in in health, I **never** pass 24 hours, without failing several times, when I can do nothing whatever & not even read a line.—

From Emma Darwin to H.E. Litchfield

[4 December 1873]

Thursday

My dearest body

It will be a long time without seeing u, but u are quite right not to let R. worry his soul out by himself. I want to hear what that troublesome impudent man has been doing. I hope poor Mrs Williams has not any regrets about leaving her children, as if they were not well cared for.

Eliz. & Snow dined yesterday & it is so m. better when we are a v. small party. F. quite enjoyed his talk w. her over Max Muller & the nonsense he talks about language & reason. She has written down her confutation of him so clearly that one wonders how she can be so confused when she prints. I believe he will make use of it, but Snow thinks M. Muller so rubbishy she does not think him worth powder & shot— She has also given him a capital translation of Linneus acct of a sleeping plant, & F is quite pleased w. his own proficiency in Latin that now he has the translation he can quite make out the original. He has never heard from Dr C. so now he is Doctoring himself & has left off all grease for 2 days, with marked benefit to his digestion, as it as was also at first— But it will never do unless he can find some substitute for the sake of warmth & keeping up his flesh— He is absolutely gloating over puddings & will break loose soon if Dr C does not write

I have got my bank cleaned & the shrubs sent for. It will be a great interest to see how they get on—

We have got Mr Nash's support for the Reading Room & today Parslow is gone to Mr C. Harris the only remaining Member of the school Board, & then we shall go to war—

Parslow says he believes Mr Ff. & Mr Allen will lock up the school & keep the keys but I hardly think they will be such geese.

I am rather interested in the book on French manners, though she is so absurdly confident in her opinion & affirms facts about the disposition of the French that I cd not venture to have an opinion on w. respect even to the inhabitants of Down. Lunch time

So Goodbye—

From Leonard Darwin to George Darwin

8 February 1878

Down, | Beckenham, Kent. | Railway Station | Orpington. S.E.R.

Feb 8th. 1878

Dear George

I am home for my regulation Saturday and Sunday only I came on Friday night instead as they had the Houle's to dinner. I think they are pleasant people, and Mr. Houle seems to have a good deal of sense, and is a liberal. He was saying that the city is nearly universally Turkish, and any expressing Russian sympathies at Lloyds is nearly hissed. I heard a ponderous joke supposed to have been made by Bismark, but I think that it was nearly fresh from the cow when I heard it, viz that speech is silver, silence is golden, and to make a statement and then retract it is Britannia metal. People were much excited on Thursday night, when it was believed that the Russians were in Constantinople. I was at the War Office at the time, and happened to come across Col. Home and other big wigs, and they all seemed much excited, but did not seem to think that we should go to war. What the use of this 6 millions is, is more than I can imagine; they could hardly increase the expenditure by a million a week, except by war being declared. I suppose the Dockyards will go ahead as quickly as possible, ditto the arsenal, and that will be a good thing from all points of view. My knee is a great deal better, and I have not worn the knee cap for more than 10 days; besides that I have little news of myself, as we have had nothing stirring at Chatham. They have made me Mess Secretary for 6 weeks whilst another man is on leave; it is a great nuisance as I dislike the work very much | They may have some idea of making me do it for a year, but I think I shall be able to fight that I have also been put on the Committee of the Institute; that is a sort of an RE association for publishing papers on RE subject, and the Pickaxe, maps of the seat -of war & anything that is likely to be useful to the corps. I am glad of it as the committee meets in London once a month, and I like the excuse for going up, and I meet a good many senior officers there.

Father's plants do not seem to have been behaving at all right: he thinks now that plants have not got eyes, but that if you shut off the light from any part of the stem, it will prevent the stem bending, which is nearly as curious as the eyes. (The black ink is so bad I can't use it) He has also been trying some experiments about putting out plants in the frost, and has been much bothered by the frost going just as he wanted it | This has all made him work too hard, and last night he had rather a bad fit of giddiness and could hardly stand, but this morning he seems as right as ever. Horace tells me to tell you that Newton told him to tell you that you are to make Lord Lillford's acquaintance and that he, Newton, would write to the aforesaid Lord Lilford | I think that the latter way of spelling is correct. I am very glad you have made some friends out there as it makes such a difference in the cheerfulness of a foreign country, more than it does in England where you have your regular occupations. Frank has been staying away from Home for some days, which is a very good thing, as it used to be so difficult to move him from home. He has been staying with Crawley most of the time, and has got through a lot of music. Last night he was to sleep at the Nashes, after going to his music at Lewisham and comes home tomorrow. Horace is here from Brighton where he is at work for a bit, and seems to like it very much; he says he is going to write to you soon.

Richard is rather feeble, but as far as I can see is improving slowly. It is hard lines on me because I could say with truth this time that the postman is waiting and I must shut up; it is a good old ending for a short letter wasted

Yours ever | Leonard Darwin