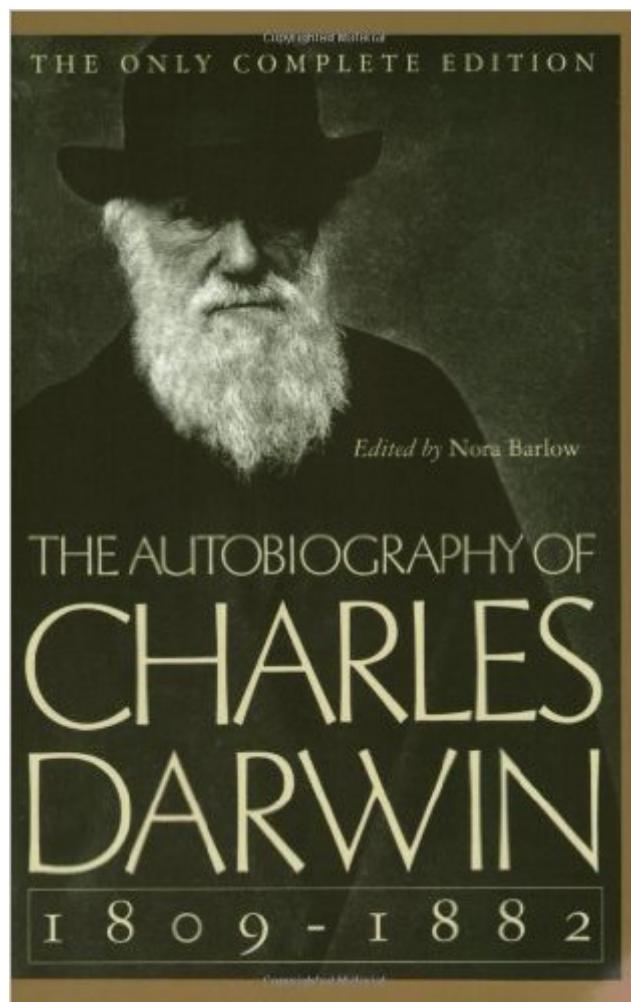


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The Autobiography Of Charles Darwin: 1809-1882



Synopsis

The only complete edition. Charles Darwin's Autobiography was first published in 1887, five years after his death. It was a bowdlerized edition: Darwin's family, attempting to protect his posthumous reputation, had deleted all the passages they considered too personal or controversial. The present complete edition did not appear until 1959, one hundred years after the publication of *The Origin of Species*. Upon its appearance, Loren Eiseley wrote: "No man can pretend to know Darwin who does not know his autobiography. Here, for the first time since his death, it is presented complete and unexpurgated, as it exists in the family archives. It will prove invaluable to biographers and cast new light on the personality of one of the world's greatest scientists. Nora Barlow, Darwin's granddaughter, has proved herself a superb editor. Her own annotations make fascinating reading." The daring and restless mind, the integrity and simplicity of Darwin's character are revealed in this direct and personal account of his life—his family, his education, his explorations of the natural world, his religion and philosophy. The editor has provided page and line references to the more important restored passages, and previously unpublished notes and letters on family matters and on the controversy between Samuel Butler appear in an appendix.

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Customer Reviews

Don't be put off by the rather grim portrait of Darwin that adorns this edition -and be aware that there are SEVERAL editions of the AUTOBIOGRAPHY, including a somewhat "censored" one in which Darwin's wife took out bits that she didn't like -perhaps the most interesting editions are the ones

that put these bits back in but italicize or bold them so that you can get a sense of what wasn't "proper" in Emma's mind. This is by no means a definitive Life of Darwin (for that I strongly encourage you to read Janet Brown's excellent 2 part series) but it does give us a gentle portrait of Darwin as he saw himself in late middle age, and it has provided lots of grist for the historians & psychohistorians in their speculations about what Darwin felt about religion, his parents, etc. For my part it only reinforces my impression of a truly wonderful man who was constantly puzzled in a pleasant way with the diversity of life & living, and while he may have had personal demons to grapple with (don't we all?) he was still able to enjoy both his science and his friends and his family. It is primarily this enjoyment that I walk away with after reading this book. Oh yes, the grim portrait on the cover. I doubt that Darwin thought of himself like that, he was FUN, and I think he mostly HAD fun, apart from the periodic bouts with illness. My favorite "portrait" of Darwin is the fantasy picture of young Chas "hanging out" in high top sneakers that adorns Phil Darlington's too-long-out-of-print EVOLUTION FOR NATURALISTS.

I enjoyed reading the autobiography. It is written in a simple and straightforward manner; the human side of the author emerges from the text clearly. Darwin was a simple man and an eminent scientist; there was nothing complex about him. He loved what he did for science and naturally wanted to be recognised for his contributions. Evolution was in the air in his time but probably not the way he presented it. He was responsible for formulating the concept of 'natural selection' which makes a whole deal of difference in the theory of evolution. As a scientist, he felt vulnerable perhaps like Newton who did not like to get embroiled in controversies and disputes with Robert Hooke and others. Newton refrained from publishing his work for a long period of time in order to avoid scientific disputes which however muddled the priority claim, later on, with Leibniz for the development of 'calculs'. Darwin hated to deal directly with similar situations such as the argument with Butler. Darwin depended on the advice of his family and friends for handling the argument with Butler. Curiously, however, a dispute on priority of developing the concept of natural selection that could have arisen with Wallace did not happen and both of them (Darwin and Wallace) stayed friends through out their lives. According to Reveal et al: "The story of interrelationship between the two men over their professional careers is one of gentlemanly: Darwin, the Country squire, living off inherited wealth and sound investments on a small estate working leisurely in the pursuit of evolution, and Wallace, the committed socialist, saved ultimately from abject poverty by Darwin and his friends who arranged a Crown pension, laboring seemingly forever in other's shadow". REFERENCE "The Darwin - Wallace 1858 Evolution Paper", Introduction, prepared by

A small book which covers a range of issues unknown to those who only got a glimpse of the man Charles Darwin through his *Origin of Species* book. The background for the *Origin of Species* is all there : the influences he got from many people on his frame of mind and on his very particular way of thinking and of experimenting with things, the convivial relationship he had with some of the greatest men of his time, Herbert Spencer included, the love of hunting he later hesitantly abandoned, the love his sisters devoted to him and the difficult relationship he had with his authoritarian (and rich) father, rich to a point that Charles knew that he never would have to fight for his own survival, etc... It is interesting to know, for instance, that the first answer he got from his father Robert when Charles asked for his permission to the famous Beagle voyage was a resounding NO. And amazing as it seems, Charles in no way was against his father's decision. Were it not for the help of his beloved uncle, brother of his father, who was very much in favor of the trip and convinced Charles' father to revert his earlier decision, the world would wait some more time for his revolutionary theory of the evolution of the species through Natural Selection of the fittest. A very interesting book, which has value added to it by the many letters included as appendices that treat on many interesting issues of Charles' life: the so-called Butler controversy, the letters referring to the first refusal of Charles Darwin's father to his Beagle voyage and many others. I am sure you will not be disappointed.

The man had a sense of humour and did not, apparently, take himself as deadly serious as some of his modern proselytes do. By which I do not want to imply any basic anti-Darwinism on my part, but a certain allergy to dogmatic hair splitting, noticed when reading some current discussions of Mr. Darwin's legacy. The best parts of the book, for me, are those where he light-handedly defines his relation to predecessors, influencers, peers and successors, like e.g. his grandfather Erasmus Darwin (and his version of evolution), or Thomas Malthus (on populations and selection pressure), like Alfred Wallace, who co-founded the theory of evolution by natural selection (and whose Malay Archipelago is my favorite travel book of all times), or like Herbert Spencer (the man about 'social Darwinism'), with whom CD disagrees completely. I also like CD's thoughts on religion. One moment he defines himself as a definite atheist (regarding a personal interfering god), which surprised me, I did not think he was so clear about that. But then, next page, he backtracks and calls himself a theist in some other way of looking at things (the preceding intelligence). Then somehow he concludes that he is an agnostic. Sound attitude. He does not really spend awfully much time and

effort on this memoir, and that determines the easygoing character of this highly readable book. A must for all who are interested in 'the meaning of life'. This edition by N. Barlow adds back some texts which had been purged by the family for this or that reason. That is a good thing. Unfortunately she also adds the whole dreary controversy called the Darwin-Butler disagreement, which is wholly superfluous.

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