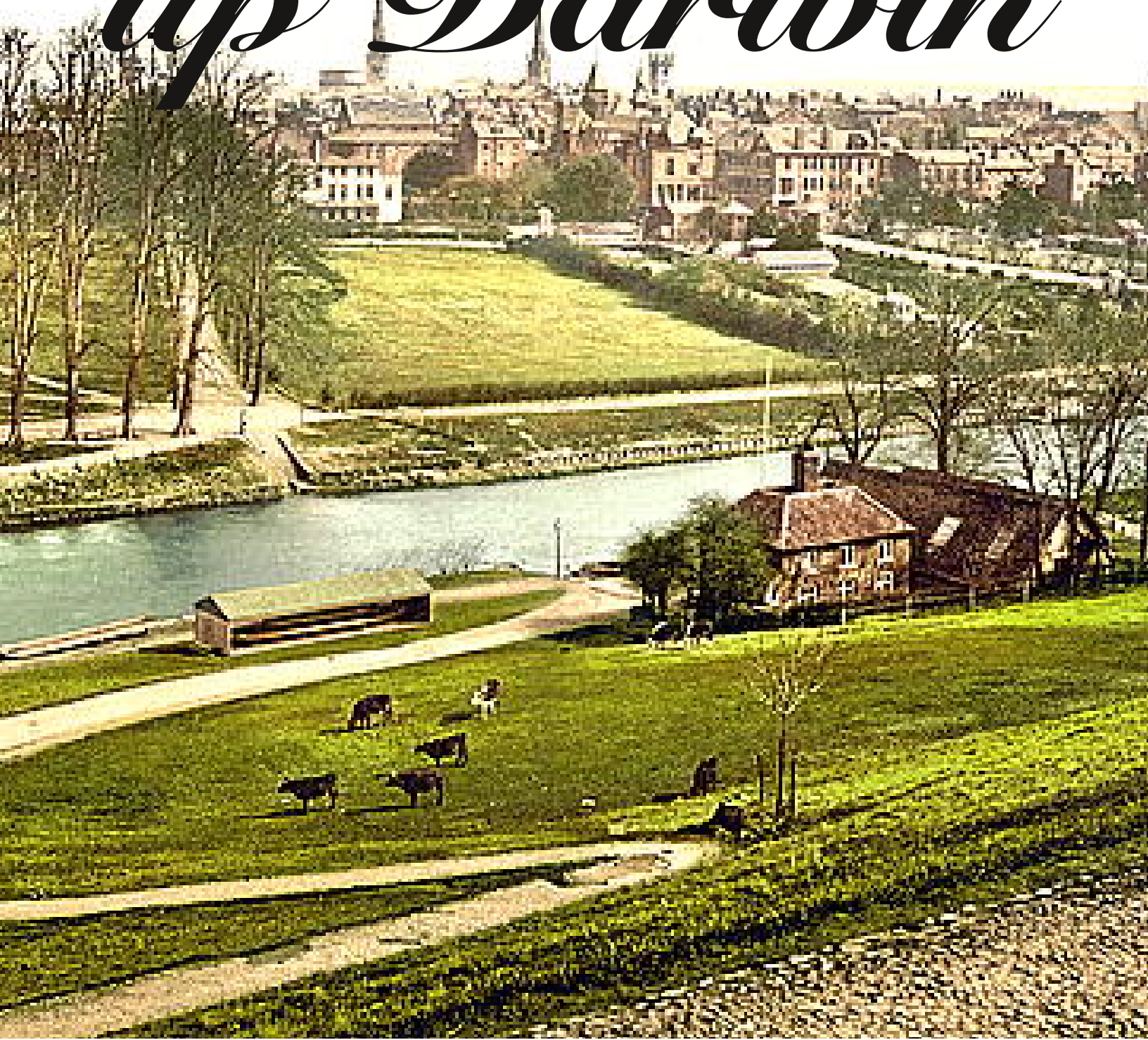


REVOLUTIONARY

*Growing  
up Darwin*





(L) Charles and (R) Catherine Darwin, ages 7 and 6, respectively.

I was born at Shrewsbury on February 12th, 1809. I have heard my Father say that he believed that persons with powerful minds generally had memories extending far back to a very early period of life. This is not my case for my earliest recollection goes back only before I was four years old, was when sitting on my older sister Caroline's knee in the drawing room. Whilst she was cutting an orange for me, a cow ran by the window which made me jump, so that I received a bad cut, of which I bear the scar to this day. Of this scene I recollect the place where I sat and the cause of the fright, but not the cut itself. I can, however, clearly remember which way the cow

ran.

When I was four years and a half old I went to the sea at Abergele, and stayed there some weeks. I remember many things, but with the exception of the maidservants I recollect none of my family who were there. I remember either myself or Catherine being naughty, and being shut up in a room and trying to break the windows.

From my childhood I also have an obscure picture of a house before my eyes, and of a neighboring small shop, where the owner gave me one fig, but which to my great joy



(L) Susannah and (R) Robert Darwin, Charles Darwin's parents.

turned out to be two. This fig was given me that the man might kiss the maidservant.

I was the fifth child of my mother, Joanna, and my father, Robert. I had three older sisters and a brother, Erasmus, who was

almost five years older than me. I had a younger sister, Catherine, one year younger than me. My father



(L) Caroline and (R) Erasmus Darwin ages 16 and 12, respectively.



was a physician and a man of business and my mother was the oldest daughter of Joshua Wedgwood I, who was a wealthy owner of a pottery business in Staffordshire.

My mother died in July 1817, when I was a little over eight years old. It is odd that I can remember hardly anything about her except going into her room, my father meeting me and me crying afterwards. I recall her death bed, her black velvet gown, and her curiously constructed worktable. I have vague recollections of one or two walks with her and I remember her saying, “if she did ask me to do something, it was solely for my good.”

In the spring of this same year, I was sent to Reverend Case’s day-school in Shrewsbury, where I stayed a year. Before going to school I was educated by my sister



The Mount, boyhood home of Charles Darwin in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England.

Caroline, but I doubt whether this plan answered. I have been told that I was much slower in learning than my younger sister Catherine, and I believe that I was in many ways a naughty boy. Caroline was extremely kind, clever and zealous; but she was too zealous in trying to improve me; for I clearly remember after this long interval of years, saying to myself when about to enter a room where she was, “What will she blame me for now?” and I made myself dogged so as not to care what she might say.

Mr. Case was the minister of the Unitarian Chapel that I attended with my mother. While attending his school I remember how very much I was afraid of meeting the dogs in Barker Street, and how at school I could not get up my courage to fight. I was very timid by

Entrance to Mr. Case's Unitarian School in Shrewsbury.





(L) Dr. Samuel Butler's Shrewsbury School, outside view; (R) inside view.



nature. I remember I took great delight at school in fishing for newts in the quarry pool. I had thus young formed a strong taste for collecting all sorts of things, shells, seals, franks, coins, and minerals, but also pebbles. The passion for collecting, which leads a man to be a systematic naturalist, a virtuoso or a miser, was very strong in me, and was clearly innate, as none of my sisters or brother ever had this taste.

I believe shortly after this, or before, I had smattered in botany, and certainly when at Mr. Case's School I was very fond of gardening. One little event during this year has fixed itself very firmly in my mind, and I hope that it has done so from my conscience having been afterwards sorely troubled by it. I told another little boy that I could produce variously colored polyanthus and primroses by watering them with certain colored fluids, which was of course a monstrous fable, and had never been tried by me. I may here also confess that as a little boy I was much given to inventing deliberate falsehoods, and this was always done for the sake of causing excitement.

I have no particularly happy or unhappy recollections of this time or earlier periods of my life. I do not remember any mental pursuits excepting those of collecting stones, gardening, and such and about this time often going with my father in his carriage, telling him of my lessons, and seeing game and other wild birds, which was a great delight to me. I was born a naturalist.

In the summer of 1818 I went to Dr. Butler's great school in Shrewsbury. In September



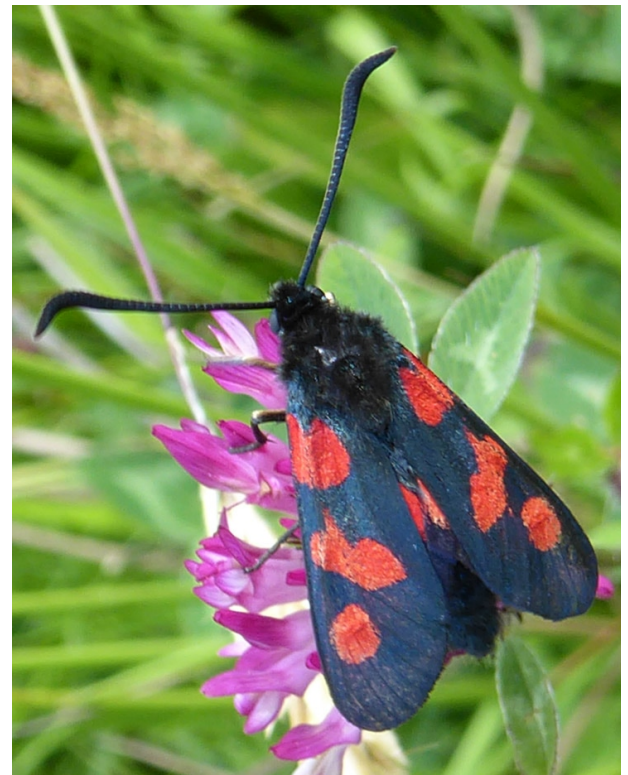
of that year I was ill with the scarlet fever. I well remember the wretched feeling of being delirious.

In July 1819, when I was 10½ years old, I went to the sea at Plas Edwards on the Welsh coast and stayed there three weeks, which now appears to me like three months. I remember a certain shady green road (where I saw a snake) & a waterfall with a degree of pleasure, which must be connected with the pleasure from scenery. The sandy plain before the house has left a strong impression, which is obscurely connected with indistinct remembrance of curious insects—probably a Cimex mottled with red, the *Zygena*. I almost made up my mind to begin collecting all the insects which I could find dead, for on consulting my sister, I concluded that it was not right to kill insects for the sake of making a collection.



I was at that time very passionate (when I swore like a trooper) and quarrelsome. The former passion has I think nearly wholly but slowly died away. When journeying there by stage coach I remember a recruiting officer at tea time, asking the maid-servant for toasted bread and butter. I was convulsed with laughter and thought it the quaintest and wittiest speech that ever passed from the mouth of man. Such is wit at 10 1/2 years old

I remained in Dr. Butler's school for seven years till mid-summer 1825, when I was sixteen years old. I must have been a very simple little fellow when I first went to the school. A boy of the name of Garnett took me into a cake shop one day, and bought some cakes for which he did not pay, as the shop man trusted him. When we came out I asked him why he did not pay for them, and he instantly answered, "Why, do you not know that my uncle left a great sum of money to the town on condition that every tradesman should give whatever was wanted without payment to anyone who wore his old hat and moved it in a particular manner," and he then showed me how it was moved. He then went into another shop where he was trusted, and asked for some small article, moving his hat in the proper



*Zygaena trifolii*, Five-spot Burnet

manner, and of course obtained it without payment. When we came out he said, “Now if you like to go by yourself into that cake-shop, I will lend you my hat, and you can get whatever you like if you move the hat on your head properly.” I gladly accepted the generous offer, and went in and asked for some cakes, moved the old hat, and was walking out of the shop, when the shop man made a rush at me, so I dropped the cakes and ran away for dear life, and was astonished by being greeted with shouts of laughter by my false friend Garnett.

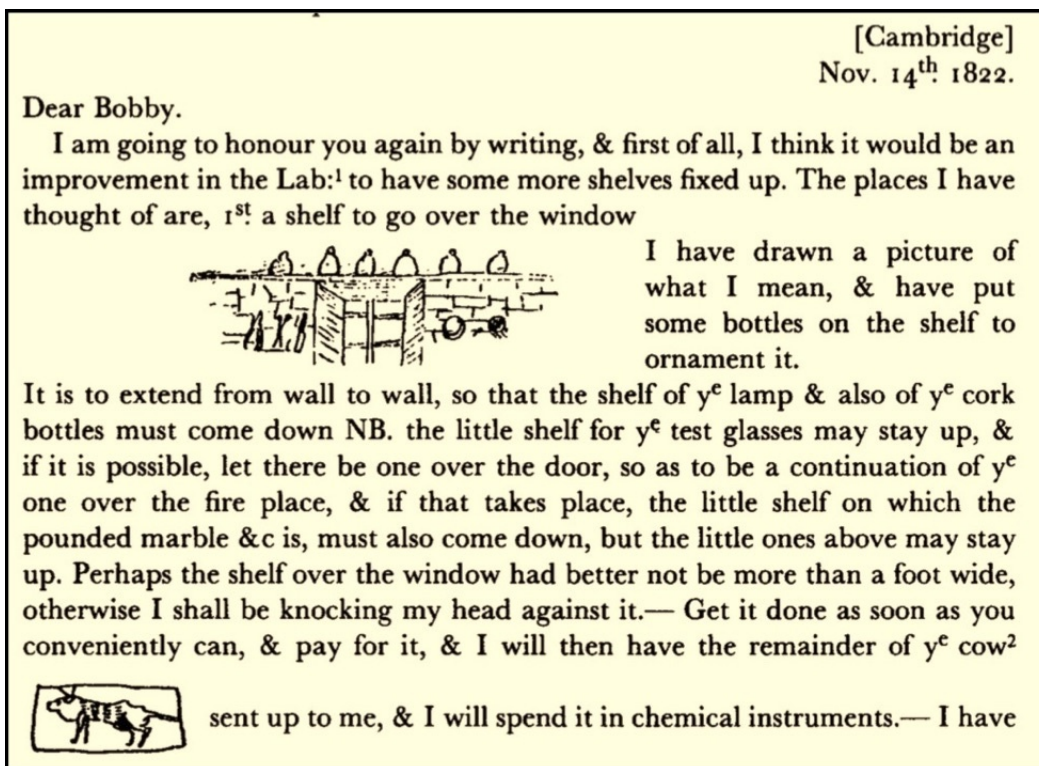
I can say in my own favour that I was as a boy humane, but I owed this entirely to the instruction and example of my sisters. I doubt indeed whether humanity is a natural or

innate quality. I was very fond of collecting eggs, but I never took more than a single egg out of a bird’s nest, except on one single occasion, when I took all, not for their value, but from a sort of bravado.

I had a strong taste for angling, and would sit for any number of hours on the bank of a river or pond watching the float; when at Maer (the home of my future father-in-law) I was told that I could kill the worms with salt and

water, and from that day I never spitted a living worm, though at the expense, probably, of some loss of success.

Towards the close of my school life, my older brother Erasmus worked hard at chemistry and made a fair laboratory with proper apparatus in the tool-house in the garden, and I was allowed to aid him as a servant in most of his experiments. He made all the gases and many compounds. The subject interested me greatly, and we often used to go on working till rather late at night. This was the best part of my education at school,



Letter from Erasmus to his 13 year old brother Charles describing suggested alterations to his chemistry lab in the garden shed at their home, The Mount. Erasmus was studying medicine at Cambridge University. Charles was called Bobby by his family when he was young. His middle name was Robert and middle names were frequently used for young boys.

for it showed me practically the meaning of experimental science. The fact that we worked at chemistry somehow got known at school, and as it was an unprecedented fact, I was nick-named “Gas

Nothing could have been worse for the development of my mind than Dr. Butler’s school, as it was strictly classical. The school as a means of education to me was simply a blank. When I left the school I was for my age neither high nor low in it; and I believe that I was considered by all my masters, and by my Father, as a very ordinary boy, rather below the common standard in intellect

Looking back as well as I can at my character during my school life, the only qualities which at this period promised well for the future, were, that I had strong and diversified tastes, much zeal for whatever interested me, and a keen pleasure in understanding any complex subject or thing.

## **Credits**

### **Images**

#### **On the cover: “From the School,” Shrewsbury, England 1890**

<http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/ppmsc.o8834/>

#### **The Mount, Butler’s school, Charles and Catherine, Caroline Darwin, Erasmus Darwin, Robert Darwin**

<http://www.peterboyd.com/darwinyoung.htm>

#### **Susannah Darwin**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sc7wSLlx5fs>

#### **St Chad’s church**

<https://stchadschurchshrewsbury.com/heritage/history/>

#### **The Mount map**

<http://shrewsburylocalhistory.org.uk/darwin.htm>

#### **St. Mary’s church**

<https://twiggietruth.wordpress.com/2015/04/28/st-marys-church-shrewsbury-shropshire/>

#### **Shrewsbury 1830**

<http://faculty.baruch.cuny.edu/naturalscience/biology/darwin/biography/shrewsbury/index.html>

#### **Case school entrance**

<http://darwinday.humanists.org/Archive.DDC2.24Dec07/htdocs/DarwinDay.org/AutoTrans/life/shrewsbury.html>

#### **Zygaena**

<https://britishlepidoptera.weebly.com/010-zygaena-trifolii-five-spot-burnet.html>

#### **Text: Darwin on his childhood**

<https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/people/about-darwin/family-life/darwin-childhood>