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Francis Sacheverell Darwin

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Travels in Spain and the East, 1808–1810

The son of Erasmus Darwin and uncle of Charles Darwin, Francis Darwin lived a mostly quiet life as a doctor in Lichfield, taking early retirement to a remote part of Derbyshire. As a young man, however, he took an intrepid and eventful Grand Tour of the Mediterranean and kept a detailed journal. The quick succession of places and events and the constant danger due to war, piracy and plague make this a thrilling read, with murder and adventure on every page. Highlights of the journey include a mountain climb with a bottle of laudanum as the only provision, a daring escape over the rooftops of a Greek village from a group of enraged natives, and dinner with Lord Byron, though Darwin frustratingly reveals little about the poet. The journal was edited for publication by his grandson in 1927, in ‘tribute to the remarkable pluck and indomitable energy of the author’.

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FRANCIS SACHEVERELL DARWIN

EDITED BY FRANCIS SWIFT DARWIN



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SIR FRANCIS SACHEVERELL DARWIN
(1786–1859)

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by

SIR FRANCIS SACHEVERELL DARWIN

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IN PIAM MEMORIAM

GEORGIANAE E. DARWIN

Filiae Dilectae, Matris Amantissimae

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MEMOIR

THE AUTHOR of this diary, Francis Sacheverell Darwin, was born on 17 June 1786—being the sixth son of the scientist and poet, Erasmus Darwin of Lichfield. He was educated at Repton School and Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and took the degree of M.D. at Edinburgh. From 1808 to 1810 he saw something of the world in the tour described in these pages—in the company of Theodore Galton, uncle of the well-known biologist Sir Francis Galton. After his return Dr Darwin practised as a physician at Lichfield; and in 1815 he married Jane Harriett Ryle, daughter of John Ryle of Macclesfield. He was knighted on 10 May 1820 at Carlton House, by George IV—on his presenting to the new sovereign an address from the City of Lichfield. Sir Francis is said to have had the best practice in the neighbourhood of Lichfield; but he gave it up from his intense love of country life, and went in 1822 or 1823 to reside at Sydnop Hall, near Darley Dale, Derbyshire; and in 1847 he removed to Breadsall Priory, near Derby, where he died on 6 November 1859—deeply lamented by his family, and by friends both rich and poor.

He left ten children, one of whom writes: “In personal appearance, as well as in mind, my father had few equals. He was 6 feet 3 inches in height, with a fine figure and a remarkably handsome and

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intellectual face. He was deeply endowed with classical and varied knowledge of all kinds”—to which the obituary notice in the *Annual Register* of 1859 (p. 419) adds that he “ranked high in scientific attainments, inheriting his father’s literary tastes and distinguished abilities.”

The following pages have been reproduced from Lady Darwin’s copy of her husband’s diary—or, rather, from a transcript of that copy made at considerable trouble and expense by Mr B. Ryle Swift, one of her grandsons. Another—the undersigned—has done the editing, *i.e.* reduced but not altered the text, left untouched certain irregularities of spelling, modernised the punctuation, and added one or two footnotes and a pedigree. While we may regret that Sir Francis did not always utilise his opportunities (why, for instance, did he not put on record his impressions of Lord Byron?), still the journal gives a vivid illustration of the dangers of travel in the days of the Peninsular War, and is in itself a tribute to the remarkable pluck and indomitable energy of the author.

F. D. S. DARWIN

January 1927

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