THE PROGRAM ON THE DARWIN COLLECTION IN THE LIBRARY

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE interest of the Society in Darwin and Evolution goes back to the years when Evolution was a hotly debated subject, even among scientists. Among the papers read at the Commemoration of the Centenary of Charles Darwin's birth (1809) and the Fiftieth Anniversary of the publication of the *Origin of Species* were: "Personal Reminiscences of Charles Darwin and of the Reception of the *Origin of Species*," by the Right Honorable James Bryce; "The Influence of Darwin on the Natural Sciences," by George Lincoln Goodale; "The Influence of Darwin on the Mental and Moral Sciences," by George Stuart Fullerton; and "The World's Debt to Darwin," by Edwin G. Conklin. On different occasions thereafter incidental studies continued to be presented in recognition of the revolutionary effect of Darwinism on the scientific and philosophical thought as well as on the institutions of human society in general.

With these things in mind it was particularly gratifying that the Research Committee responded so generously to our recommendation that the Society acquire the large group of letters exchanged between Darwin, Lyell and other scientists—the Darwin-Lyell correspondence of more than 450 pieces. In the course of processing and making it available for scholars, its intrinsic value as well as its potentialities became increasingly apparent, and plans gradually took shape for an all-round collection of source materials in our Library on the revolutionary impact of Darwinism on science and scientific thought. Search for originals was instituted and other priceless collections were soon added to the Darwin-Lyell correspondence. Among these were the unique group of letters and photographs of 67 scientists, assembled by Lady Lyell; scores of fugitive Darwin letters; a collection of 87 letters of Darwin to G. J. Romanes (1874–1882), and the recent accession of a small collection of Huxley letters. Where originals have not been available, considerable progress has been made in getting microfilms or photostats through the friendly cooperation of custodians and scientific societies abroad. With the aid of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, for example, photo-duplications were secured of the large collection of Darwin materials at Down House, Kent, England.

As the corpus of manuscripts grew, it became very apparent that a rounded collection on Darwin and Evolution, similar to our Franklin Collection, involved the acquisition not only of original manuscript materials but also of published works, including those of precursors and contemporaries of Darwin as well as those of scientists and scholars of more recent date. In our efforts to implement the latter it became obvious that the help of specialists was essential, and it was decided to extend the system of Library Research Associateships into this field also.

Fortunately Dr. Loren C. Eiseley, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, had already become deeply interested, and on invitation of the Committee agreed to devote such of his spare time as he had available to the problem. The following brief survey of recent developments brings the report up to date. The special Committee which the Chairman was instructed to appoint is being set up for its first meeting in the autumn of 1954 to consider long-range plans as well as the program for research and publication in connection with the 100th anniversary in 1959 of the publication of the *Origin of Species*.

WILLIAM E. LINGELBACH,
Librarian and Chairman of the Committee on Library

"This morning," wrote Charles Darwin to Sir Charles Lyell, shortly after the publication of the *Origin of Species*, "I got a letter from the Academy of Sciences of Philadelphia, announcing that I am elected a correspondent. . . . It shows that some Naturalists there do not think me such a scientific profligate as many think me here." [1] This

[1] Darwin, Francis, *Life and letters of Charles Darwin* 2: 307, London, 1887.

early (1860) expression of pleasure over American reception of his labors in natural history makes it peculiarly appropriate that the "priceless collection of letters" from Charles Darwin to Sir Charles Lyell should have been acquired by the American Philosophical Society.[2]

The fact that Philadelphians such as Joseph Leidy and Edward Drinker Cope had much to do with the paleontological explorations which contributed heavily to the final acceptance of the theory of evolution makes it even more remarkable that these letters should have found their final resting place in a library and a city notable since the time of Thomas Jefferson for its preeminence in the field of natural science. Once more this appreciation of American efforts can be documented from the words of the master himself. "As for the fossil remains in the West," he writes in 1877, "no words will express how wonderful they are." [3] In that same year another great English biologist, E. Ray Lankester, commented, "America is, indeed, rapidly becoming the headquarters of paleontological research." [4]

It is well known that the shadow of a native Philadelphian, one of the greatest comparative anatomists that America has yet produced, looms mightily across the scene of these endeavors. Edward Drinker Cope, member of the American Philosophical Society, still awaits adequate biographical treatment. His older contemporary, Joseph Leidy, has been described by Henry Fairfield Osborn as having begun, twelve years before the publication of the *Origin of Species,* to assemble paleontological data which would have been of great use to Darwin. Though he largely confined himself to precise anatomical description, there is little doubt that he was, in the words of Osborn, "an evolutionist *sub rosa.*" [5]

As the diverse threads of evolutionary history are thus gathered together, it can be seen that there is a certain justice in the fact that this great correspondence should come to rest in the city of Philadelphia and that every endeavor should be made to carry out the words of the late President Conklin: "It is hoped that they [the letters] will become the center of a collection of letters, manuscripts, and primary publications, on the evolution of the earth and its inhabitants, on the doctrine of Darwinism, which in many respects, and especially in reference to man and society, is the most far reaching and revolutionary theory in the whole history of science and philosophy." [6]

One can well imagine, in the light of this perceptive statement, the magnitude of the task which immediately confronted the Librarian of the Society, Dr. William E. Lingelbach. Should the collection be confined to documentary materials? Should it include so far as possible the letters of Darwin's and Lyell's associates? Should it include the great array of scientific treatises of all sorts which grew up around the theory? Should it contain attacks, defenses—the vast array of magazine literature of the nineteenth century, a century, incidentally, which supported and read, in proportion to population, a far more extensive serious periodical literature than that of our own day? Furthermore, it was apparent that if all these things were done, and done properly, there would have to be a great amount of indexing of pertinent periodical material as well as a search on the open market for many books, not all costly rareties by any means, but hard to find and consuming the leisure of a person adequately acquainted with the subject and willing to browse in the bookstores of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston in the hope of locating missing items.

The plans of the Library, in so far as they have been completely formulated, involve several areas of approach. Ideally, these are the objectives to be accomplished:

First, a very thorough card index with subheads and extensive cross-indexing upon all periodical, as well as book subject matter treating of Darwin, his theories, his forerunners, his associates. Recently, for example, we had one Pennsylvania graduate student, Dr. Henry Michael, scanning the available Russian literature, both pre- and post-Revolutionary, in order to record all Russian references which may be pertinent to the project.

Secondly, we have been seeking in the open market not alone such primary materials as letters of the Darwinian circle which are still extant in private hands, but, in addition, by every means available to us, the books produced by the writers of the Darwinian period which bore in any fashion

[2] See Dr. E. G. Conklin's detailed account of this acquisition under the title, Letters of Charles Darwin and other scientists and philosophers to Sir Charles Lyell, Bart. *Proc. Amer. Philos. Soc.* **95** (3): 220–222, 1951 (*Lib. Bull.* for 1951).

[3] Darwin, Francis, *Life and letters of Charles Darwin* **3**: 233, London, 1887.

[4] *Popular Science Monthly* **2**: 710, 1877.

[5] Osborn, H. F., *Impressions of great naturalists,* 159, 2nd ed., New York, Scribner, 1928.

[6] *Op. cit.,* 221.

upon the theory of Natural Selection, or any other of Darwin's ideas. Many of these books of both the pre- and post-Darwinian era are far scarcer than might at first be imagined. Certain ones, even when local Philadelphia editions were issued, such as in the case of William Whewell's *Indications of the Creator,* are difficult, if not impossible, to locate anywhere among the libraries of the vicinity. As for their appearance in second-hand bookstores this must be a rare phenomenon indeed, and, judging by catalogues, is almost as rare an event in England as here in Philadelphia.

In Britain the high cost of paper during the First World War caused a tremendous destruction of old religious books whose monetary value was trifling, but whose paper, by poundage, had risen high on the local market. The result of this paper shortage was a great loss of old volumes whose interest to us now lies in the first religious attempts to refute the new geology or biology, or, even more interestingly, to amalgamate the new science with the old theology. The impact of Darwinism upon the religious world was diverse in its effects both in America and Europe. One might say, in fact, that there was, from the religious standpoint, a right and a left wing to the Darwinian party. Asa Gray, here in America, represented the right wing, whereas Huxley, and perhaps even more vigorously Ernst Haeckel in Germany, represented the agnostic and anti-church position.

Gray, by contrast, was a clever metaphysician and had a great deal to do with reconciling American churchmen to the teachings of the new science. Less aggressive than Huxley, his writings, nevertheless, played a potent if quieter part in the change that swept, with surprising rapidity, through theological circles.

Thirdly (and this should be obvious from my remarks above), it is the intention of the Society that this collection should represent in every possible manner the impact of Darwin upon the various sciences and upon the religious life of the Victorian and later eras. This latter effort is being carried out with strict impartiality. Criticism, laudatory addresses, everything germane to the subject is being sought and filed. The history of science is not alone a chronicle of successes. It is also, if properly written, a record of failures, of irrational stubbornness, of opinions held in spite of, rather than because of, facts. Even Darwin, who once said that he was a firm believer "that without speculation there is no good and original observation," remarked that part of being a good scientist was to know when to drop a fruitless hypothesis or experiment. It is obvious from the literature that this talent was not always evident in his contemporaries.

Part of the interest in this era is to see how loath were both scientists and public men in other disciplines to resolve their differences or to recognize that, whatever they might think of Darwin, the world would never be the same after the publication of the *Origin* and the *Descent of Man* (1871). Whether in philosophy, metaphysics, or theology, it is the intention of those working on the collection to make it fully representative of the history of thought as it concerns Darwinism in all fields. We shall, to the best of our human abilities, endeavor to carry out this task exhaustively. Nor shall we stop with Darwin; we are pushing the collections back into the past among his great French predecessors and beyond. We are, also, and particularly in the case of the history of man, which was hailed by Darwin himself as the greatest preoccupation of the naturalist, bringing the record right down into modern times. Darwin knew he would not live to see the human story unfolded, but he staked his theory of descent upon it. It is only doing justice to his memory that the now growing fossil record of man should be adequately represented in the collection.

Darwin made his estimation of man's position in the primate world and guessed at his ancient occupancy of the planet in a time when there were no clearly recognizable human fossils to reenforce his conclusions. There is a certain poetic justice, then, that among the items added to the Library collection is an extended array of works upon human evolution, documenting long years after Darwin's decease the reality of that human pathway of ascent of which he and Huxley had caught far-off clairvoyant glimpses. The bones have been found at last. One might wish that circle of great companions could have lived to see them, but this is something rarely granted to the scientific pioneer.

One final thing strikes the thoughtful observer as he pores over Darwin's letters, whether published or unpublished. They are rich in a way that no modern scholar of my acquaintance has the time to be rich in his correspondence. They represent the long, thoughtful outpourings of a solitary man in the winter evenings at Down. They range across the world and back, they probe the past, they deal with Providence and those

mysteries beneath the basic fabric of the universe. They are also very patient letters for so nervous and distraught a man. They are full of that grave gentleness which is so often lacking in the hysteria of the modern world, and they will stand for all time representative of a day that is gone. A day when men returned to the quiet of a house without radio or television, and found within themselves such treasures to be communicated, as would, long after their deaths, fill volumes and talk attentively to troubled men one hundred years away—men, who, if they stop spinning the fretful dials in the living room, too often feel only the rising of an empty silence in their hearts.

The life of Charles Darwin has more to teach than the development of a now accepted theory of organic change. He stands for a great natural tradition, something akin also to the mind of the American, Thoreau, who found a way of talking to the world out of the similar silences of Walden. Darwin is more alive in his letters than in his long array of books, just as Thoreau is similarly alive in his journals. Both men were uncannily perceptive on the subject of nature, and it is the delight of the servants of this project that its accumulated insights will inspire generations of the time to come. Later when our thoughts mature, we hope to be able to inform the public at more length of the plans entertained by the Society for a volume or two of letters and a comprehensive Symposium upon the Centenary Anniversary of the publication of the *Origin of Species* in 1959. That date will also be, by a happy chance, the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Darwin's birth.