

In Search for Converts: Charles Darwin's letters to Alfred Russel Wallace

Written by Ernesto Salazar

Friday, 22 January 2010 12:45 - Last Updated Monday, 25 January 2010 10:20

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Letter 4. Down, Bromley, Kent. April 6, 1859

My dear Mr. Wallace, this morning I received your pleasant and friendly note of Nov. 30th. The first part of my MS.30 is in Murray's hands, to see if he likes to publish it. There is no Preface, but a short Introduction, which must be read by everyone who reads my book. The second paragraph in the Introduction I have had copied verbatim from my foul copy, and you will, I hope, think that I have fairly noticed your papers in the Linnean Transactions. You must remember that I am now publishing only an Abstract, and I give no references. I shall of course allude to your paper on Distribution; and I have added that I know from correspondence that your explanation of your law is the same as that which I offer. You are right, that I came to the conclusion that Selection was the principle of change from study of domesticated productions; and then reading Malthus I saw at once how to apply this principle. Geographical distribution and geographical relations of extinct to recent inhabitants of South America first led me to the subject. Especially the case of the Galapagos Islands.

I hope to go to press in early part of next month. It will be a small volume of about 500 pages or so. I will, of course, send you a copy.

I forget whether I told you that Hooker, who is our best British botanist, and perhaps the best in the world, is a full convert, and is now going immediately to publish his confession of faith... Huxley is changed and believes in mutation of species: whether a convert to us, I do not quite know... My neighbour and excellent naturalist, J. Lubbock, is an enthusiastic convert. I see by Natural History notices that you are doing great work in the Archipelago; and most heartily do I sympathise with you. For God's sake take care of your health. There have been few such noble labourers in the cause of natural science as you are. Farewell, with every good wish. Yours sincerely, C. Darwin.

Letter 5. Down, Bromley, Kent. August 9, 1859

My dear Mr. Wallace, I received your letter and memoir on the 7th, and will forward it to-morrow

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to the Linnean Society. But you will be aware that there is no meeting till beginning of November. Your paper seems to me admirable in matter, style and reasoning; and I thank you for allowing me to read it. Had I read it some months ago I should have profited by it for my forthcoming volume. But my two chapters on this subject are in type; and though not yet corrected, I am so wearied out and weak in health that I am fully resolved not to add one word, and merely improve style. So you will see that my views are nearly the same with yours, and you may rely on it that not one word shall be altered owing to my having read your ideas.

Letter 5. Down, Bromley, Kent. May 18, 1860

My dear Mr. Wallace, I received this morning your letter from Amboyna dated Feb. 16th, containing some remarks and your too high approbation of my book. Your letter has pleased me very much, and I most completely agree with you on the parts which are strongest and which are weakest. The imperfection of the geological record is, as you say, the weakest of all; but yet I am pleased to find that there are almost more geological converts than of pursuers of other branches of natural science. I may mention Lyell, Ramsay, Jukes, Rogers, Keyerling, all good men and true. Pictet of Geneva is not a convert, but is evidently staggered (as I think is Bronn of Heidelberg), and he has written a perfectly fair review in the *Bib. Universelle* of Geneva. Old Bronn has translated my book, well done also into German, and his well-known name will give it circulation. I think geologists are more converted than simple naturalists because more accustomed to reasoning.

Before telling you about the progress of opinion on the subject, you must let me say how I admire the generous manner in which you speak of my book: most persons would in your position have felt bitter envy and jealousy. How nobly free you seem to be of this common failing of mankind. But you speak far too modestly of yourself; you would, if you had had my leisure, have done the work just as well, perhaps better, than I have done it. Talking of envy, you never read anything more envious and spiteful (with numerous misrepresentations) than Owen is in the *Edinburgh Review*... The attacks have been heavy and incessant of late. Sedgwick and Prof. Clarke attacked me savagely at the Cambridge Philosophical Society, but Henslow defended me well, though not a convert. Phillips has since attacked me in a lecture at Cambridge; Sir W. Jardine in the *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal*, Wollaston in the *Annals of Nat. History*, A. Murray before the Royal Soc. of Edinburgh, Houghton at the Geological Society of Dublin, Dawson in the *Canadian Nat. Magazine*, and many others. But I am getting case-hardened, and all these attacks will make me only more determinedly fight. Agassiz sends me personal civil messages, but incessantly attacks me; but Asa Gray fights like a hero in defence. Lyell keeps as firm as a tower, and this autumn will publish on the *Geological History of Man*, and will then declare his conversion, which now is universally known... Here is a curious thing: a Mr. Pat. Matthews, a Scotchman, published in 1830 a work on *Naval Timber and Arboriculture*, and in the appendix to this he gives most clearly but very briefly in half-dozen

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paragraphs our view of Natural Selection. It is a most complete case of anticipation... Yesterday I heard from Lyell that a German, Dr. Schaffhausen, has sent him a pamphlet published some years ago, in which the same view is nearly anticipated, but I have not yet seen this pamphlet. My brother, who is a very sagacious man, always said, "You will find that someone will have been before you." I am at work at my larger work, which I shall publish in separate volumes. But for ill-health and swarms of letters I get on very, very slowly. I hope that I shall not have wearied you with these details. C. Darwin.

In Darwin, Francis, and A. C. Steward, eds. 1903, *More letters of Charles Darwin: a record of his work in a series of hitherto unpublished letters*, pp. 136-38; 141-43, John Murray, London.