

DARWIN AND WALLACE

I

Such magnanimity as was shown by both Darwin and Wallace in the publication of the theory of natural selection is so rare and beautiful that it should be brought to the attention of the public whenever possible. In reading Mr. W. B. Northrop's recent article in *The Outlook* on Alfred Russel Wallace, I was surprised to find that Mr. Northrop seemed to belittle Darwin's generosity, and to leave the impression that Darwin had acted in an unfair manner by "rushing into print" when he found that Wallace had arrived at the same conclusions

that he had, thus depriving Wallace of much of his rightful honor.

May I, out of a sense of justice, present a few paragraphs in order to make clear what Mr. Northrop fails to do—namely, that Darwin's course was entirely just and generous?

As early as 1844 Darwin had drawn up a brief abstract of his theory and had even arranged with his wife for the editing and publishing of it in case of his sudden death. In 1856 he began an elaboration of this work, as Lyell had urged him strongly to do, but his plans were overthrown, he tells us in his autobiographical sketch, by the receipt in the summer of 1858 of Wallace's essay which contained his own views.

Darwin sent Wallace's essay to Lyell, as Wallace had requested, and proposed that Wallace's permission to publish it be obtained. Darwin was strongly inclined to withhold his abstract in favor of Wallace, but Lyell and Hooker, to whose judgment as to the propriety of publishing Darwin yielded, were unwilling that Darwin should do so. Accordingly, as is well known, the papers of Darwin and Wallace were communicated jointly to the Linnæan Society, with an introduction by Lyell and Hooker setting forth the reasons for the joint publication, that they were considering not only the relative claims of priority but the claims of science generally.

In a letter to Lyell in 1858 Darwin writes: "There is nothing in Wallace's sketch which is not written out much fuller in my sketch, copied in 1844 and read by Hooker some dozen years ago. . . . But as I had not intended to publish any sketch, can I do so honorably, because Wallace has sent me an outline of his doctrine? I would far rather burn my whole book than that Wallace or any other man should think that I had behaved in a paltry spirit."

In view of Darwin's correspondence and his general attitude toward the honor of priority, it seems hardly fair to suggest that he "rushed into print" and deprived Wallace of his just reward.

Finally, it must be noted that the special recognition of Darwin does not rest upon any question of priority, but upon the abundant and painstaking proof which he marshaled to the support of the theory of natural selection, and without which it would never have been accepted by scientific workers.

Beloit, Wisconsin.

B. W. KUNKEL.

II

In my article on the late Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, in your issue of November 22, I did not intend to convey the impression that Darwin attempted to deprive Wallace of the credit for the latter's co-discovery of natural selection. This is a misconception arising from my statement that Darwin was forced into print on

receipt of Wallace's essay. It is not stated in my article that Darwin was actuated by motives of jealous rivalry, of which his great soul was, of course, incapable. That Darwin was compelled to publish long before he had intended to do so there is no doubt whatever. On this point I quote the words of Dr. Wallace before the Linnæan Society, July 1, 1908, on the occasion of the Darwin-Wallace celebration: "My letter [on natural selection] came upon him like a thunderbolt from a cloudless sky. This forced him into what he considered a premature publicity."

Darwin himself says on this point:

Another element in the success of the book ["Origin of Species"] was its moderate size, and this I owe to the appearance of Mr. Wallace's essay. Had I published on the scale in which I began to write in 1856, the book would have been four or five times as large as the "Origin of Species." . . . But my plans were overthrown; for early in the summer of 1858, Mr. Wallace, who was then in the Malay Archipelago, sent me the essay. [See Life of Darwin.]

Again, Darwin wrote to Wallace in 1870:

I hope it is a satisfaction to you to reflect—and very few things in my life have been more satisfactory to me—that we have never felt any jealousy towards each other, though in some things rivals. [Life.]

I trust the above will make clear the point outlined in my article, and correct any false impression that might have been given.

Brooklyn, New York.

W. B. NORTHROP.