

12th June, 1956.

My dear Irving,

It was delightful to get your long letter and rock magnetism news. Keith has, however, prevailed on me to the effect that after retirement from Cambridge I should come to Newcastle with a view to laying the foundations of a Department of Genetics there, and incidentally ~~continuing in~~ endeavouring to complete some of my own researches.

Certainly the Dana is an attractive precedent, and did not Carnegie have a ship especially built of non-magnetic material? However, it would probably be more practical to get the C.S.I.R.O. to charter a plane ad hoc whenever you want to visit Kerguelen or Bouvet.

I think there is a parallelism in the nature of scientific controversy between continental drift in the last 80 years or so, and organic evolution about 100 years earlier. Each idea as it originated was necessarily speculative, and not accompanied certainly by sufficiently cogent evidence to carry final conviction. There were, however, many suggestive pointers. In consequence of this natural situation both questions have been argued with

imperfect facts, incorrect theories, and often incompetent reasoning, over a long period during which many people have committed themselves to impossible positions, and many more ~~daring~~ ^{leaving} to burn their fingers have enclosed themselves in towers not of ivory, but of very solid wood. In the period about 1800-1850, although geological specimens were being collected and described, experiments in plant hybridization carried out, the classification of animals and plants greatly improved, and embryological studies at least had attracted attention, yet so unwilling are ordinary men to run the risk of contemptuous ridicule, no one of consequence attempted to revive what had been left as speculative, and almost poetical, ideas by Buffon, Erasmus Darwin, and Lamarck. Darwin worked on the problem almost secretly from 1838, and only published in 1859 because he was forced to. After that the ice came down like Niagara, but of course the new idea was still ill-understood and ill-expounded for at least the next 50 years, during which a few subordinate causes of error had been removed by special researches.

I think a lot of geologists must be timidly peering out of their holes on hearing the strange news that geophysicists are talking about continental drift, and I have often wondered how many scientific discoveries of importance have been left unmade for lack of the quality called moral courage.

I hope the new movement will be concerned to commend the earlier writers where they seem to have been correct, and to correct them where they seem to be wrong, for the evolution controversy has examples of people like Professor McBride claiming that everything of value in Darwinism was in Lamarck, and of others jeering at the origin of species in the very words of satire appropriate to some of Lamarck's extravagances. In fact it may be quite important to distinguish the new from the old, while giving ~~slight~~^{generous} credit to the speculative pioneers in your field.

I have just had a line from Bruce Griffing, who I think is with Frankel in the genetical unit which he has been building up. I hope you will meet him, as perhaps you have already done. He has a wife and, so far I think, one daughter, but there may be more.

I was very glad to see Geof Watson's papers on dispersion. He is also a nice chap to be in touch with.

Joan joins me in sending her best wishes.

Sincerely yours,