“I cannot remember that I ever published a word directly against religion of the clergy; but if you were to read a little pamphlet which I received a couple of days ago by a clergyman, you would laugh, and admit that I had some excuse of bitterness. After abusing me for two or three pages, in language sufficiently plain and emphatic to have satisfied any reasonable man, he sums up by saying that he vainly searched the English language to find terms to express his contempt for me and all Darwinians.”

“On my last visit to Down, Mr. Darwin said, at his dinner-table, ‘Brodie Innes and I have been fast friends for thirty years, and we never thoroughly agreed on any subject but once, and then we stared at each other, and thought one of us must be very ill.’”


Introduction

The publication of “On the origin of Species” in November 1859 projected Charles Darwin into such an exalted orbit that it was bound not only to affect his relationship with William Darwin Fox, but with the world in general. The first signs of this are hard to detect but probably affected both Darwin’s health and those around him and his leisure time; “I have done little of my regular work this summer; chiefly owing to incessant anxiety & movements on account of Etty. My correspondence about the “Origin” has also been gigantic, & a day hardly passes without one, two or three letters on the subject. I have amused myself with a little Natural History of other kinds…” he wrote to Fox in 1860 (Letter #141). He took refuge in working...
on less contentious subjects than evolution, such as orchids, insectivorous plants and the physiology of plants. Why this subject area took his fancy is not clear, because he had an interest in a broad range of subjects, many of them seemingly more suitable such as animal studies. He often complained of the over-emphasis on systematics and classification, which is where many of the potential areas lay. Possibly, his evolutionary interests combined with an inclination to strike out somewhere new took him in the new direction (Allan, 1977). “I am much pleased & somewhat surprised at your liking my orchid-book:”, Darwin later wrote to Fox (Letter #148), “the Botanists praise it beyond its deserts, but hardly anyone, not a Botanist, except yourself, as far as I know, has cared for it. The subject interested me much, & was written almost by accident; for it was half written as a mere paper & then I found it too long, & thought I would risk publishing it separately”. This was his book, On the various contrivances by which British and foreign orchids are fertilised by insects and on the good effects of intercrossing (1862). This work was long-planned but immediately after the publication of the “Origin”, Darwin was seeking solace in observing plants, as he wrote to Fox, “& have lately worked hard at the power of the Drosera or sun-dew in catching flies; & tremendous slaughter the plant makes” (Letter #141). This latter work would be his second book, “Insectivorous plants” (1865), after the Origin.

Whether Darwin’s ill health was exacerbated by his new-found fame or whether he and Emma were more concerned to avoid visitors is a matter of much debate (see, e.g., Colp, 1977). On occasions when Darwin wanted information, as with the digestive processes of insectivorous plants, he could quietly slip up to London and into a residence of an acquaintance to gain information. However, for most the door was shut; and this included Fox, despite several attempts [Letter #165 (n1)]. Nevertheless Fox did manage one last meeting, in the house of Darwin’s brother, Erasmus, in 1862 (Letter #151); and although Fox had contact with Darwin’s siblings and other relations at various times, and although the correspondence continued until Fox’s death in 1880, the two men never met again.

Darwin, of course, found that servicing the “Origin” was a massive undertaking in itself. Just the American edition took up much time; in addition, translations were needed into several languages. Then there was the enormous backlash from conservative biologists and churchmen (Himmelfarb, 1959; Ellegård, 1990), from where the title to this chapter derives. Darwin tried to answer their criticisms in individual letters and in the changes to the third edition of the Origin and subsequent editions. “My correspondence about the “Origin” has also been gigantic, & a day hardly passes without one, two or three letters on the subject”, he wrote to Fox in Letter #141, and then again in Letter #142, “I am at present busy with a new & somewhat enlarged & corrected Edit. of the well abused Origin, which the Public like, whatever the Reviewers may do”.

However, as the dust settled on the “Origin”, Darwin had already decided on his agenda for the next decade or more. This was to publish the parts of his “Big Book” not adequately covered in the “Origin”; most notably, “variation under domestication” and “sexual selection”. Almost immediately after completing the “Origin” and dealing with the first round of correspondence (see Correspondence, Vol. 8), Darwin began work on Variation (Journal, 1860) and had three chapters completed by the