

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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The National Antarctic Expedition.

I HAVE recently been made acquainted with certain hypotheses which are believed to explain the motives which induced Prof. Gregory to resign the position of scientific director of the National Antarctic Expedition. Thus, it is commonly believed that he was influenced by his family and friends. Indeed, the opinion has recently been expressed that I was, perhaps, the cause of his withdrawal, or that, at least, I advised it. It is impossible to imagine how such an opinion can have arisen if my letter to the Fellows of the Royal Society had been read with any attention, unless, indeed, I have failed to give a fair and accurate account, in spite of most serious efforts, put forth with a grave sense of responsibility.

I am, however, now able to set the matter at rest by a quotation from Prof. Gregory's letters received since the circulation of my account of the negotiations. I am quite sure that Prof. Gregory would have no objection to this use of his words in order to confront the unfounded rumours which have obtained currency.

It may be remembered that after the meeting of the Joint Committee on March 5, at which Major Darwin's proposed changes in the conditions offered to, and accepted by, Prof. Gregory were approved, although I had strongly opposed the introduction of any alteration whatever, "I wrote to Prof. Gregory a full account of what had happened, carefully explaining that his representative and many of his friends supported the changes, that I had confidence that the proposal was made to enable the Geographical Society to accept the instructions, and that it was not intended to prevent, and, I believed, would not prevent, his being landed" (p. 6 of my letter).

I have now received two letters from Prof. Gregory, one written on April 16, before he had received mine, the other on April 23, after he had received it.

In the former he says: "I hear that the Joint Committee has accepted some of Darwin's amendments; but as I do not know what they were I can form no opinion. But —, —, and — say they make no difference. I hope not."

In the latter, written in reply to my letter, he says: "Very many thanks for your fight against Darwin's amendment, which I should not have accepted had I been in London or been advised of it by cable. However, I suppose it is now too late to go back on it; and as it has [been] accepted for me I must trust to luck."

Later on in his letter the explanation of his resignation becomes perfectly clear; indeed, he asks me to make it known. In the event of the President of the Geographical Society declining to sign the instructions, he says: "*Please let it be known that, except for a modification backward of Darwin's amendment, I will not accept another change.*"

Between my letter describing the meeting on March 5 and May 15, when his final resignation was known, I held no communication of any kind with him. But others had communicated those further changes which he was determined not to accept.

It must be clear to any one who will read the history of the negotiations carefully, that he thought, and had good reason to think, that he was being trifled with, and felt that the time had come—to a less patient man it would have come long before—when he would no longer submit to the vigorous attacks of the Royal Geographical Society and the weak, half-hearted defence of the Royal Society.

A few hours after the above words were written a letter arrived from Prof. Gregory dated May 5, just after he had received the cable from the new Committee of six. The letter indicates clearly the reasons which induced him to withdraw, and I therefore quote several passages from it. The letter was written hurriedly, and not intended for publication; but I know that Prof. Gregory would assent to my action, pursued as it is with the object of preventing the misinterpretation of his motives. A few unimportant verbal changes have been made.

"You at least," he says, "will not have expected me to accept the cabled terms. I was not surprised at them; only surprised that the Royal Society had given way apparently so readily and that I heard the result a month earlier than I expected."

"The terms proposed appear to me, as far as I understand them from the cable, a complete surrender of what the Royal Society's representatives declared in February was essential to the proper execution of the magnetic work. The position gives no power to secure a fair opportunity for work to the man who would have to bear the blame for scientific failure."

"To accept responsibility without adequate power is a false position which is almost sure to lead to trouble. No man has a right to take such a position. As I do not think the powers are adequate to the responsibilities, it is my simple duty to withdraw. I hope the Royal Society will find a better man, who will be satisfied that he can make the Expedition a scientific success on the instructions given. I am not; therefore I must withdraw my provisional acceptance of the appointment."

"It will be difficult to prevent my withdrawal being misinterpreted. I had thought of cabling to ask you to publish an explanation, but thought it best to leave you to act as you thought best. I can absolutely rely on your judgment, and know you will have done anything necessary to repel insinuations."

I have done my best to prevent Prof. Gregory's motives from being misunderstood, and it is with the same object that this communication is now written and accompanied by quotations from his letters.

He concludes with a reference, which is far too appreciative, to the support which—unfortunately for the scientific prospects of the expedition and, I must add, unfortunately for the credit of the Royal Society as the guardian of the interests of science—received, at the later stages of the negotiations, the help of so small a proportion of my colleagues.

Oxford, June 11.

EDWARD B. POULTON.

A Raid upon Wild Flowers.

Prof. L. C. MIALl, in the last number of NATURE, makes very definite and serious charges against the organisers of the vacation course for Essex teachers in the New Forest. As author of the programme so severely, and, as I contend, unfairly, criticised by your correspondent, I should be glad to be allowed an opportunity for reply.

The programme, as you will see by the copy enclosed, consists of two parts, the first dealing with a series of Saturday afternoon botanical rambles in our own county and the other with the proposed vacation course to be held at the New Forest. The first is of a pioneer character, and is open to all teachers whether they are familiar with botany or not, while the vacation course is organised for those of our teacher-students who have already received one, two or more years' instruction in laboratory and field-work in botany at the central institution here. For this course special application must be made to the committee.

From a perusal of the programme Prof. Miall accuses the Committee for Technical Instruction in Essex with organising a raid in the New Forest especially upon wild flowers tending to extinction, and bases his charge upon certain alleged facts. Your readers are told that with respect to these rare plants our intention is to collect, &c., "not only single specimens but duplicates for special fascicles." There is no such reference in the programme of the vacation course in the New Forest, but in a note at the end of the Saturday afternoon programme occurs these words.

"Opportunity might be taken, during the course of the Saturday rambles, of commencing a school herbarium, or collection of dried plants illustrative of the flora of collector's own district. A type collection would naturally be arranged in botanical order, but duplicates might be used for special fascicles representing, for example, 'meadow plants,' 'cornfield weeds,' &c."

The letter continues—"Local guides are to direct them to the last retreats of the rare plants of the New Forest." This, too, is a mistake. In the Saturday afternoon rambles we are to be accompanied by local guides whose names and addresses are given in the programme, but no such arrangements were made for the New Forest. It is true that I sought the sympathy of local naturalists, and, indeed, so anxious was I to prevent even the suspicion of "raiding" that I wrote to the Rev. J. E. Kelsall, the local representative of the Selborne Society, whose strong views on the preservation of the plant and bird life of the New Forest are so well known, to tell him of our proposal and to assure him that our chief object was the study of living plants, and that if we discovered anything rare, or even scarce, it would be left untouched by our students; and I thought that