

Preface

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Preface

The contents of this book are mainly quite new material, representing the most important final results of the work that has occupied the writer for most of his mature life—leisure to 1915, and almost all the time since. Portions have been published in Age and Area (1922), and in The Course of Evolution (1940), and in many papers.

As a boy he became interested in distribution by reading the works of his granduncle William Swainson (p. 294) and by looking at his collections of shells which we had at home. Gradually he went over to botany, the line of his great-grand-father (cf. p. 295), helped by the masterly teaching of Prof. S. H. Vines and Sir Francis Darwin at Cambridge, and stimulated by a remark of one of our leading distributionists, that distribution seemed to be almost beyond the range of the human intellect. The accidental loss of his better eye also helped in this direction, and drove him into distributional work, while at the same time the illogicality of the common conception of natural selection was coming home to him very strongly with his work in the tropical forests and rivers, and the phenomena of endemism.

Gradually he found that distribution worked to a great extent upon an arithmetical basis, and his first work was published in Age and Area. By this time his method of using the subconscious was largely perfected (cf. p. 248), and deductions from age and area were continually appearing, quite unexpectedly. Finding that when tested upon the facts (a work requiring much time and labour) they invariably proved correct, and that illustrations could always be easily found in any taxonomic

work, he acquired great faith in this method, and began to collect facts for a book upon evolution and geographical distribution. As it became too large for convenience, he published the evolutionary part of it under the title The Course of Evolution, and gave a further eight years of work to the present book.

Much help has been given by many people, to whom the writer's acknowledgments are given below.

J. C. WILLIS.

Les Terrages, avenue des Alpes.

Montreux, octobre 1948.

Postscript to Preface and Acknowledgements

The above preface was written when the author was nearing the completion of the book. Then two unfortunate accidents combined with the effects of increasing age to reduce his capacity for work to about a quarter. He takes the opportunity allowed by this small space to express his warmest thanks to Prof. Baehni for his patience in the delay of publication, and his kindly help in many ways; also to Mlle Dubugnon and to Dr Weibel, for much help.

J.C.W.

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To Dr. W. Robyns, Director of the Botanic Gardens at Brussels, who was very helpful, especially in allowing me the use of their great library, in which I spent a few days in many different journeys to and from London. To Sir David Prain, Sir Arthur Hill, and Sir Edward Salisbury, successively Directors of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, and to Drs. Cotton, Fischer, Hutchinson, and Turrill in the great herbarium, who were all of great assistance in many ways.

And to many other friends, especially to Mrs. Howe, the well-known traveller and author, to the late Mr. John Murray of the Indian Educational Department, to Prof. Brooks, Mr. G. Udney Yule, and my daughter Mrs. Anderson at Cambridge, to Mr. I. H. Burkill at Leatherhead, to Prof. Small at Belfast, to my cousin J. P. de Chanaz, Mr. H. Davidson, and the late Dr. C. Balfour Stewart at Montreux, and others.

Finally, for the early stages of the work, to the staffs of the institutions of which the writer had once the honour to be the Director, at Peradeniya (Ceylon) and at Rio de Janeiro, in both of which he had full opportunity for the study of vegetable life in the tropics.