

CORRESPONDENCE.

The Concealing Coloration Question.

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE AUK':

Dear Sir: I have read the paper on 'The Concealing Coloration Question,' by Francis H. Allen, which appeared in your October issue. While I am not prepared to offer any criticism on the merits of this paper, for or against, I do protest against articles appearing in the pages of 'The Auk' which bear such a smack of personality. Such papers only invite others of like nature, and often result in taking up too much valuable space.

Very truly yours,

RUTHVEN DEANE.

Chicago, Ill.,

December 2, 1912.

[In reply to the above and the following letters of criticism the editor desires to express his regret that any remarks objectionably personal should, through his oversight, have appeared in the pages of 'The Auk.' He found himself so strongly in sympathy with the position taken by Mr. Roosevelt and Drs. Barbour and Phillips in this discussion, that he hesitated unduly to exercise his editorial function for fear of being unfair to the other side. Consequently some statements in the paper referred to were allowed to stand, which the author should have been asked to correct and alter. 'Misquotations' and 'pieces of faulty reasoning' (p. 492) should have been clearly differentiated, for while 'misquotation' is a serious charge, 'faulty reasoning' may be faulty only in the opinion of the critic. In other words it is a matter of personal opinion. Furthermore, the two examples of alleged misquotation that are cited cannot be so regarded if the entire statements of Mr. Thayer and Mr. Roosevelt are taken into consideration. Mr. Roosevelt was in the first instance not quoting Mr. Thayer verbatim regarding the crouching hare, and merely put in quotation marks some of Mr. Thayer's expressions. What Mr. Roosevelt was pointing out was that in one statement Mr. Thayer regards the running hare as obliterated in the sight of creeping animals, which have their eyes below the level of the hare's tail, while in another statement he regards the crouching hare as boldly conspicuous in the sight of the same class of animals, and this is surely what Mr. Thayer says.

In the other case it is charged that Mr. Roosevelt has misread Mr. Thayer when he quotes him as saying that an *animal escapes observation, not because it sits motionless like a stump or clod or some such inanimate thing but purely because of its shading which he says is rendered oblitative by the countergradation of shades*.¹ Here Mr. Roosevelt used no quotation marks

¹ Italicized portion quoted verbatim from Mr. Roosevelt's paper (italics mine).

and was simply presenting Mr. Thayer's views as concisely as possible. What Mr. Thayer says is as follows: *The reader . . . is now in a position to perceive the fallacy of the statement prevalent in former years and still made by certain writers, that a protectively colored animal of the type described above escapes detection because being of a dull brown color like the ground and the bushes, it looks when it sits motionless like a clod or a stump or some such inanimate thing. . . . The protectively colored animal, on the other hand, is as it were obliterated by its countergradation of shades. . . . If these animals were merely brown or gray like clods or stumps they would not be concealed, because their structural forms are too distinct, and the eyes of enemies are keen to detect their characteristic modelling and outlines. On the other hand, a perfect shade gradation, even of some rankly brilliant color would go far toward concealing an animal.*¹

Mr. Roosevelt can surely not be charged with misquotation here! Mr. Allen was probably contrasting his remarks with p. 15 of Mr. Thayer's book instead of with p. 19.

There are other quotations the significance of which would be materially changed if the entire paragraph or correlative matter elsewhere were considered. Indeed in a complicated discussion such as this it is quite possible to quote apparently contradictory statements from different parts of the same paper. The editor repeats his regret that through his oversight statements like the above were allowed to pass uncorrected.

WITMER STONE.]

The Scientific Value of Bird Photographs.

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE AUK':

Dear Sir: In selecting as the major title of his paper in 'The Auk' for October (Vol. XXIX, pp. 489-507) 'Roosevelt vs. Thayer . . . ' rather than *Revealing vs. Concealing Coloration*, Mr. Francis H. Allen evidently betrays his mental attitude toward a controversy to which his article is contributed.

Fair-minded, critical discussion of any subject tends to advance our understanding of it, but criticism which is unpleasantly personal, even discourteous in tone, which accuses a writer of misquoting, misrepresenting and perverting, of being dogmatic, ignorant, and grossly careless, obscures the main issues and for this, as well as for other reasons, is to be deplored. Particularly is this true when the criticism is not only unwarranted, but when the critic himself appears to be in error.

To illustrate Mr. Roosevelt's "inaccurate habit of mind and slap-dash style of thinking" Mr. Allen (*l. c.*, p. 492) challenges Mr. Roosevelt's reference² to photographs of certain birds as illustrating their conspicuousness in nature, and writes that Mr. Roosevelt quite overlooks "the obvious facts

¹ Italicized sentences quoted verbatim from Mr. Thayer's book (italics mine).

² *Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, Vol. XXX, 1911, pp. 156; 220.



Stone, Witmer. 1913. "The Concealing Coloration Question." *The Auk* 30, 146–147. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4071943>.

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