

its habits of life. I then began systematically to study domestic productions, and after a time saw clearly that man's selective power was the most important agent. I was prepared, from having studied the habits of animals, to appreciate the struggle for existence, and my work in geology gave me some idea of the lapse of past time. Therefore, when I happened to read 'Malthus on Population,' the idea of natural selection flashed on me. Of all the minor points, the last which I appreciated was the importance and cause of the principle of divergence."

During the leisure and retirement in which Darwin lived after his return, he occupied himself, as we see from this letter, first and specially with the study of organisms in their cultivated state; that is, domestic animals and garden plants. This was undoubtedly the most likely way to arrive at the Theory of Selection. In this, as in all his labours, Darwin proceeded with extreme care and accuracy. With wonderful caution and self-denial, he published nothing on this subject during a period of twenty-one years, from 1837 to 1858, not even a preliminary sketch of his theory, which he had written as early as 1844. He was always anxious to collect still more certain experimental proofs, in order to be able to establish his theory in a complete form, and on the broadest possible foundation of experience. While he was thus aiming at the greatest possible perfection, which might perhaps have led him never to publish his theory at all, he was fortunately disturbed by a countryman of his, who, independently of Darwin, had discovered the Theory of Selection, and in 1858 sent its outlines to Darwin himself, with the request to hand them to Lyell