

Royal Society, Burlington House, London W.  
March 21, 1871

Dear Sir,

I think it due to your scientific  
eminence and the high position you  
hold that I should not compare myself  
as is usual to the more formal announce-  
ment of the decision of the Committee of  
Professors of the Royal Society relatively to  
your paper which formed the subject of  
a Bakerian Lecture, but endeavor to  
give you some idea of the motives which  
probably weighed with the Committee  
in coming to that decision. I say "which

probably weighed," for by our Statutes the ultimate decision is taken by ballot, and the vote is taken simply on the question "that the paper be printed in the Transactions" so that I can only gather the probable motives of the Committee from the reports of referees and preliminary discussion.

In the first place then the evidence afforded by the papers as to the nature of the plants of which they are the remains appeared in very many cases gave too slender a support to the conclusions which you have drawn. Similar remains of recent plants even with all the advantages arising from recent (not fossilized) structure, would in many cases such as those you addressed afford little or no evidence of the true affinities

of the plants, according to the testimony of one  
who is eminently qualified to judge. Doubtless  
the palaeontologist in the eager pursuit of  
his favourite science is tempted to make the  
most of his scanty materials; and in the  
impossibility of obtaining demonstrative evi-  
dence, or evidence approaching to a demonstra-  
tion, to supplement what he has got by conjecture  
more or less probable. But such conjectures  
are from the nature of the case precarious,  
and though in a ledger they might be free  
from danger as to their influence on readers,  
it is otherwise in the case of one of your  
scientific eminence, and in such a case,  
especially if they appeared in the pages of the  
Philosophical Transactions, they would run the

risk of running to stereotype error.

It was believed also that some of the more important parts of your paper had already been given to the world in *Archaea*

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While there was much in your paper which would remain to all time, there was much also which appeared to be of a highly speculative nature which it did not seem prudent to stamp with the character of permanence which would be given by a place in the Philosophical Transactions.

In saying to you thus freely what I suppose may have been the notices which weighed with the Committee I beg you to be assured that I have only been influenced by what I feel to be due to your high position in the scientific world.

I am Dear Sir, Yours sincerely  
G. G. Stokes

To Principal Dawson Esq.