Ridgway Collection

Franklin and Marshall College

DEPARTMENT OF
CHEMISTRY

LANCASTER, PA. Jan 11 1903

Mr. Robert Ridgway.

My dear Sir:-

I am greatly gratified to receive an Opinion on my "Occult Sense" paper from one of your wide experience; also to learn that you agree with my generalisations. Similar comment has come to me from various parts of America and Europe by none of it has been so welcome or so really contributive as the communication from you. My estimate of the sense of smell of the turkey vulture as being extremely low is based on my direct evidence but rather upon analogy with the condor, which Charles Darwin proves to his satisfaction to be practically without a sense of smell. I believe now that my reasoning on the point is not supported by the facts. Your observations as well as mass of data - some of it evidently reliable - which I have received from Mr Gurney of the British Mus. strongly indicate that even among species of the same family there is a wide variation in the development of olfactory powers. Even admitting a re-

faint sense of smell in C. aura there is nothing that has come to light since I wrote the paper that changed my view of a widely though selectively distributed occult sense, involving direction, which has taken three phases as developed by the forms necessities & Existence - food, mate and home. I think your observations on the finding of concealed hog carcasses, by buzzards will include some which, like my freshly killed bird and incident, will be difficult of explanation to account for on the buzzard scheme.

I am always supremely conscious of the dimness of the lights in which I am working. Some day perhaps the mechanism of a process so purely "occult" as a homing act may be as clear to science as the operations of magnetic force. Until such light comes I believe that hypothesis must blaze the way - even though it lead at times to blind trails in the jungle of the unknown.

I have to-day your exhaustive work on Am. Birds of Prey which I hereby acknowledge my most profound admiration. Can we expect another publication in this Ridgeway series? I enclose card for your answer.

Thanking you for your kindly and valuable letter

Yours truly

Herbert H Beck.