

NATURAL SELECTION

AND

TROPICAL NATURE

ESSAYS ON

DESCRIPTIVE AND THEORETICAL BIOLOGY

BY

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ETC.

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PREFACE

THE present volume consists mainly of a reprint of two volumes of essays—*Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection*, which appeared in 1870, with a second edition in 1871, and has now been many years out of print; and, *Tropical Nature and Other Essays*, which appeared in 1878.

In preparing a new edition of these works to appear as a single volume I have thought it advisable to omit two essays—that on “The Malayan Papilionidæ” as being too technical for general readers, and that on “The Distribution of Animals as indicating Geographical Changes,” which contains nothing that is not more fully treated in my other works. Another essay—“By-Paths in the Domain of Biology”—has also been partly omitted, one portion of it forming a short chapter on “The Antiquity and Origin of Man,” while another portion has been incorporated in the chapter on “The Colours of Animals and Sexual Selection.” More than compensating for these omissions are two new chapters—“The Antiquity of Man in North America” and “The Debt of Science to Darwin.”

Many corrections and some important additions have been made to the text, the chief of which are indicated in the table given below; and to facilitate reference the two original works have separate headings, and form Parts I. and II. of the present volume.

ALTERATIONS IN THE SECOND EDITION OF
CONTRIBUTIONS, ETC.

1ST ED.	2D ED.		PRESENT VOLUME.
221	221	Additional facts as to birds acquiring the song of other species	105
223	223A } 223B }	Mr. Spruce's remarks on young birds pairing with old	107
228	223A } 223B }	Pouchet's observations on a change in the nests of swallows	omitted
229	—	Passage omitted about nest of Golden Crested Warbler, which had been inserted on Rennie's authority, but has not been confirmed by any later observers.	
261	261	Daines Barrington, on importance of protection to the female bird	138
	372	Note A	205
	372B	Note B	209

ADDITIONAL MATTER IN THE PRESENT VOLUME.

NATURAL SELECTION.

	PAGES
Additional facts by Leroy, Spalding, Lowne, and Dixon on the Nest-Building and other Instincts of Birds	108-112
Dr. Abbott on Nesting of Baltimore Oriole	114
Professor Jettles and Mr. Henry Reeks on Alterations in Mode of Nest-Building	115

TROPICAL NATURE.

Note on Dr. Shufeldt's Investigations into the Affinities of Swifts and Humming-Birds	337
---	-----

THE ANTIQUITY OF MAN IN NORTH AMERICA.

(Additional Chapter)	433-449
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THE DEBT OF SCIENCE TO DARWIN.

(Additional Chapter)	450-475
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CONTENTS

NATURAL SELECTION

I. ON THE LAW WHICH HAS REGULATED THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW SPECIES

Geographical Distribution dependent on Geologic Changes—A Law deduced from well-known Geographical and Geological facts—The Form of a true system of Classification determined by this Law—Geographical Distribution of Organisms—Geological Distribution of the Forms of Life—High Organisation of very ancient Animals consistent with this Law—Objections to Forbes's Theory of Polarity—Rudimentary Organs—Conclusion Pages 3-19

II. ON THE TENDENCY OF VARIETIES TO DEPART INDEFINITELY FROM THE ORIGINAL TYPE

Introductory Note—Instability of Varieties supposed to prove the permanent distinctness of Species—The Struggle for Existence—The Law of Population of Species—The Abundance or Rarity of a Species dependent upon its more or less perfect Adaptation to the Conditions of Existence—Useful Variations will tend to Increase; useless or hurtful Variations to Diminish—Superior Varieties will ultimately Extirpate the Original Species—The Partial Reversion of Domesticated Varieties explained—Lamarck's Hypothesis very different from that now advanced—Conclusion 20-33

III. MIMICRY, AND OTHER PROTECTIVE RESEMBLANCES AMONG ANIMALS

Test of true and false Theories—Importance of the Principle of Utility—Popular Theories of Colour in Animals—Importance of Concealment as Influencing Colour—Special Modifications of Colour—Theory

of Protective Colouring—Objection that Colour, as being dangerous, should not exist in Nature—Mimicry—Mimicry among Lepidoptera—Lepidoptera mimicking other Insects—Mimicry among Beetles—Beetles mimicking other Insects—Insects mimicking Species of other Orders—Cases of Mimicry among the Vertebrata—Mimicry among Snakes—Mimicry among Birds—Mimicry among Mammals—Objections to Mr. Bates's Theory of Mimicry—Mimicry by Female Insects only—Cause of the dull Colours of Female Birds—Use of the gaudy Colours of many Caterpillars—Summary—General deductions as to Colour in Nature—Conclusion Pages 84-90

IV. ON INSTINCT IN MAN AND ANIMALS

How Instinct may be best Studied—Definition of Instinct—Does Man possess Instincts?—How Indians travel through unknown and trackless Forests 91-97

V. THE PHILOSOPHY OF BIRDS' NESTS

Instinct or Reason in the Construction of Birds' Nests—Do Men build by Reason or by Imitation?—Why does each Bird build a peculiar kind of Nest?—How do young Birds learn to build their first Nest? Do Birds sing by Instinct or by Imitation?—How young Birds may learn to build Nests—The Skill exhibited in Nest-building Exaggerated—Man's Works mainly Imitative—Birds do Alter and Improve their Nests when altered Conditions require it—Conclusion 98-117

VI. A THEORY OF BIRDS' NESTS

Changed Conditions and persistent Habits as influencing Nidification—Classification of Nests—Sexual differences of Colour in Birds—The Law which connects the Colours of Female Birds with the mode of Nidification—What the Facts Teach us—Colour more variable than Structure or Habits, and therefore the Character which has generally been Modified—Exceptional cases confirmatory of the above Explanation—Real or apparent exceptions to the Law stated at page 124—Various modes of Protection of Animals—Females of some groups require and obtain more Protection than the Males—Conclusion 118-140

VII. CREATION BY LAW

Laws from which the Origin of Species may be deduced—Mr. Darwin's Metaphors liable to Misconception—A case of Orchid-structure ex-

plained by Natural Selection—Adaptation brought about by General Laws—Beauty in Nature—How New Forms are produced by Variation and Selection—The Objection that there are Limits to Variation—Objection to the Argument from Classification—The *Times* on Natural Selection—Intermediate or generalised Forms of Extinct Animals an indication of Transmutation or Development—Conclusion—A Demonstration of the Origin of Species by Natural Selection

Pages 141-166

VIII. THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RACES UNDER THE LAW OF NATURAL SELECTION

Wide differences of Opinion as to Man's Origin—Outline of the Theory of Natural Selection—Different Effects of Natural Selection on Animals and on Man—Influence of External Nature in the development of the Human Mind—Extinction of Lower Races—The Origin of the Races of Man—The Bearing of these Views on the Antiquity of Man—Their Bearing on the Dignity and Supremacy of Man—Their Bearing on the future Development of Man—Summary—Conclusion 167-185

IX. THE LIMITS OF NATURAL SELECTION AS APPLIED TO MAN

What Natural Selection can Not do—The Brain of the Savage shown to be Larger than he Needs it to be—Size of Brain an important Element of Mental Power—Comparison of the Brains of Man and of Anthropoid Apes—Range of Intellectual Power in Man—Intellect of Savages and of Animals compared—The use of the Hairy Covering of Mammalia—The Constant Absence of Hair from certain parts of Man's body a remarkable Phenomenon—Savage Man feels the want of this Hairy Covering—Man's Naked Skin could not have been produced by Natural Selection—Feet and Hands of Man considered as Difficulties on the Theory of Natural Selection—The Voice of Man—The Origin of some of Man's Mental Faculties, by the preservation of Useful Variations, not possible—Difficulty as to the Origin of the Moral Sense—Summary of the Argument as to the Insufficiency of Natural Selection to account for the Development of Man—The Origin of Consciousness—The Nature of Matter—Matter is Force—All Force is probably Will-force—Conclusion 186-214

TROPICAL NATURE AND OTHER ESSAYS

I. THE CLIMATE AND PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF THE EQUATORIAL ZONE

The three Climatal Zones of the Earth—Temperature of the Equatorial Zone—Causes of the Uniform High Temperature near the Equator—Influence of the Heat of the Soil—Influence of the Aqueous Vapour of the Atmosphere—Influence of Winds on the Temperature of the Equator—Heat due to the Condensation of Atmospheric Vapour—General Features of the Equatorial Climate—Uniformity of the Equatorial Climate in all Parts of the Globe—Effects of Vegetation on Climate—Short Twilight of the Equatorial Zone—The Aspect of the Equatorial Heavens—Intensity of Meteorological Phenomena at the Equator—Concluding Remarks Pages 217-237

II. EQUATORIAL VEGETATION

The Equatorial Forest-belt and its Causes—General Features of the Equatorial Forests—Characteristics of the Larger Forest-Trees—Flowering Trunks and their Probable Cause—Uses of Equatorial Forest-trees—The Climbing Plants of the Equatorial Forests—Palms—Uses of Palm-trees and their Products—Ferns—Ginger-worts and Wild Bananas—Arums—Screw-pines—Orchids—Bamboos—Uses of the Bamboo—Mangroves—Sensitive Plants—Comparative Scarcity of Flowers—Concluding Remarks on Tropical Vegetation 238-269

III. ANIMAL LIFE IN THE TROPICAL FORESTS

Difficulties of the Subject—General Aspect of the Animal Life of Equatorial Forests—Diurnal Lepidoptera or Butterflies—Peculiar Habits of Tropical Butterflies—Ants, Wasps, and Bees—Ants—Special Relations between Ants and Vegetation—Wasps and Bees—Orthoptera and other Insects—Beetles—Wingless Insects—General Observations on Tropical Insects—Birds—Parrots—Pigeons—Picariæ—Cuckoos—Trogons, Barbets, Toucans, and Hornbills—Passeres—Reptiles and Amphibia: Lizards—Snakes—Frogs and Toads—Mammalia: Monkeys—Bats—Summary of the Aspects of Animal Life in the Tropics

270-311

IV. HUMMING-BIRDS : AS ILLUSTRATING THE LUXURIANCE OF TROPICAL NATURE

Structure—Colours and Ornaments—Descriptive Names—The Motions and Habits of Humming-birds—Display of Ornaments by the Male—Food—Nests—Geographical Distribution and Variation—Humming-birds of Juan Fernandez as illustrating Variation and Natural Selection—The Relations and Affinities of Humming-birds—How to Determine Doubtful Affinities—Resemblances of Swifts and Humming-birds—Differences between Sun-birds and Humming-birds—Conclusion
Pages 312-337

V. THE COLOURS OF ANIMALS AND SEXUAL SELECTION

General Phenomena of Colour in the Organic World—Theory of Heat and Light as producing Colour—Changes of Colour in Animals produced by Coloured Light—Classification of Organic Colours—Protective Colours—Warning Colours—Sexual Colours—Normal Colours—The Nature of Colour—How Animal Colours are produced—Colour a Normal Product of Organisation—Theory of Protective Colours—Theory of Warning Colours—Imitative Warning Colours—The Theory of Mimicry—Theory of Sexual Colours—Colour as a means of Recognition—Colour proportionate to Integumentary Development—Selection by Females not a cause of Colour—Probable use of the Horns of Beetles—Cause of the greater Brilliancy of some Female Insects—Origin of the Ornamental Plumage of Male Birds—Theory of the Display of Ornaments by Males—Natural Selection as neutralising Sexual Selection—Greater Brilliancy of some Female Birds—Colour-development as illustrated by Humming-birds—Theory of Normal Colours—Local causes of Colour-development—The influence of Locality on Colour in Butterflies and birds—Sense-perception influenced by Colour of the Integuments—Summary on Colour-development in Animals 338-394

VI. THE COLOURS OF PLANTS AND THE ORIGIN OF THE COLOUR-SENSE

Source of Colouring Matter in Plants—Protective Coloration and Mimicry in Plants—Attractive Colours of Fruits—Protective Colours of Fruits—Attractive Colours of Flowers—Attractive Odours in Flowers—Attractive Grouping of Flowers—Why Alpine Flowers are so Beautiful—Why Allied Species of Flowers differ in Size and Beauty—Absence of Colour in Wind-fertilised Flowers—The same Theory of Colour applicable to Animals and Plants—Relation of the Colours

of Flowers and their Geographical Distribution—Recent Views as to Direct Action of Light on the Colours of Flowers and Fruits—Concluding Remarks on the Importance of Colour in the Organic World—On the Origin of the Colour-sense: Supposed Increase of Colour-perception within the Historical Period—Concluding Remarks on the Colour-sense Pages 395-415

VII. THE ANTIQUITY AND ORIGIN OF MAN

Indications of Man's extreme Antiquity—Antiquity of Intellectual Man—Sculptures on Easter Island—North American Earthworks—The Great Pyramid—Conclusion 416-432

VIII. THE ANTIQUITY OF MAN IN NORTH AMERICA

Ancient Shell Mounds—Man Coeval with Extinct Mammalia—Man in the Glacial Period—Palæolithic Implements in North America—The Auriferous Gravels of California—Fossil Remains under the Ancient Lava Beds—Works of Art in the Auriferous Gravels—Human Remains in the Auriferous Gravels—Concluding Remarks on the Antiquity of Man 433-449

IX. THE DEBT OF SCIENCE TO DARWIN

The Century before Darwin—The Voyage of the *Beagle*—*The Journal of Researches*—Studies of Domestic Animals—Studies of Cultivated and Wild Plants—Researches on the Cowslip, Primrose, and Loosestrife—The Struggle for Existence—Geographical Distribution and Dispersal of Organisms—*The Descent of Man* and later Works—Estimate of Darwin's Life-Work 450-475

INDEX 476

ESSAYS ON NATURAL SELECTION

I

ON THE LAW WHICH HAS REGULATED THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW SPECIES¹

Geographical Distribution dependent on Geologic Changes

EVERY naturalist who has directed his attention to the subject of the geographical distribution of animals and plants must have been interested in the singular facts which it presents. Many of these facts are quite different from what would have been anticipated, and have hitherto been considered as highly curious, but quite inexplicable. None of the explanations attempted from the time of Linnæus are now considered at all satisfactory; none of them have given a cause sufficient to account for the facts known at the time, or comprehensive enough to include all the new facts which have since been, and are daily being, added. Of late years, however, a great light has been thrown upon the subject by geological investigations, which have shown that the present state of the earth and of the organisms now inhabiting it is but the last stage of a long and uninterrupted series of changes which it has undergone, and consequently, that to endeavour to explain and account for its present condition without any reference to those changes (as has frequently been done) must lead to very imperfect and erroneous conclusions.

The facts proved by geology are briefly these: That

¹ This article, written at Sarawak in February 1855 and published in the *Annals and Magazine of Natural History*, September 1855, was intended to show that some form of evolution of one species from another was needed in order to explain the various classes of facts here indicated; but at that time no means had been suggested by which the actual change of species could have been brought about.

during an immense but unknown period the surface of the earth has undergone successive changes; land has sunk beneath the ocean, while fresh land has risen up from it; mountain chains have been elevated; islands have been formed into continents, and continents submerged till they have become islands; and these changes have taken place, not once merely, but perhaps hundreds, perhaps thousands of times.—That all these operations have been more or less continuous but unequal in their progress, and during the whole series the organic life of the earth has undergone a corresponding alteration. This alteration also has been gradual, but complete; after a certain interval not a single species existing which had lived at the commencement of the period. This complete renewal of the forms of life also appears to have occurred several times.—That from the last of the geological epochs to the present or historical epoch, the change of organic life has been gradual: the first appearance of animals now existing can in many cases be traced, their numbers gradually increasing in the more recent formations, while other species continually die out and disappear, so that the present condition of the organic world is clearly derived by a natural process of gradual extinction and creation of species from that of the latest geological periods. We may therefore safely infer a like gradation and natural sequence from one geological epoch to another.

Now, taking this as a fair statement of the results of geological inquiry, we see that the present geographical distribution of life upon the earth must be the result of all the previous changes, both of the surface of the earth itself and of its inhabitants. Many causes, no doubt, have operated of which we must ever remain in ignorance, and we may, therefore, expect to find many details very difficult of explanation, and in attempting to give one, must allow ourselves to call into our service geological changes which it is highly probable may have occurred, though we have no direct evidence of their individual operation.

The great increase of our knowledge within the last twenty years, both of the present and past history of the organic world, has accumulated a body of facts which should afford a sufficient foundation for a comprehensive law embracing and

explaining them all, and giving a direction to new researches. It is about ten years since the idea of such a law suggested itself to the writer of this essay, and he has since taken every opportunity of testing it by all the newly-ascertained facts with which he has become acquainted, or has been able to observe himself. These have all served to convince him of the correctness of his hypothesis. Fully to enter into such a subject would occupy much space, and it is only in consequence of some views having been lately promulgated, he believes, in a wrong direction, that he now ventures to present his ideas to the public, with only such obvious illustrations of the arguments and results as occur to him in a place far removed from all means of reference and exact information.

A Law deduced from well-known Geographical and Geological Facts

The following propositions in Organic Geography and Geology give the main facts on which the hypothesis is founded.

GEOGRAPHY

1. Large groups, such as classes and orders, are generally spread over the whole earth, while smaller ones, such as families and genera, are frequently confined to one portion, often to a very limited district.

2. In widely distributed families the genera are often limited in range; in widely distributed genera well-marked groups of species are peculiar to each geographical district.

3. When a group is confined to one district, and is rich in species, it is almost invariably the case that the most closely allied species are found in the same locality or in closely adjoining localities, and that therefore the natural sequence of the species by affinity is also geographical.

4. In countries of a similar climate, but separated by a wide sea or lofty mountains, the families, genera, and species of the one are often represented by closely allied families, genera, and species peculiar to the other.

GEOLOGY

5. The distribution of the organic world in time is very similar to its present distribution in space.

6. Most of the larger and some small groups extend through several geological periods.

7. In each period, however, there are peculiar groups, found nowhere else, and extending through one or several formations.

8. Species of one genus, or genera of one family occurring in the same geological time, are more closely allied than those separated in time.

9. As, generally, in geography no species or genus occurs in two very distant localities without being also found in intermediate places, so in geology the life of a species or genus has not been interrupted. In other words, no group or species has come into existence twice.

10. The following law may be deduced from these facts: *Every species has come into existence coincident both in space and time with a pre-existing closely allied species.*

This law agrees with, explains, and illustrates all the facts connected with the following branches of the subject: 1st, The system of natural affinities. 2d, The distribution of animals and plants in space. 3d, The same in time, including all the phenomena of representative groups, and those which Professor Forbes supposed to manifest polarity. 4th, The phenomena of rudimentary organs. We will briefly endeavour to show its bearing upon each of these.

*The Form of a true system of Classification determined
by this Law*

If the law above enunciated be true, it follows that the natural series of affinities will also represent the order in which the several species came into existence, each one having had for its immediate antitype a closely allied species existing at the time of its origin. It is evidently possible that two or three distinct species may have had a common antitype, and that each of these may again have become the antitypes from which other closely allied species were created. The effect of this would be, that so long as each species has had but one new species formed on its model, the line of affinities will be simple, and may be represented by placing the several species in direct succession in a straight line. But if two or more species have been independently formed on the plan of a