

Individual Differences

The many slight differences which appear in the offspring from the same parents, or which it may be presumed have thus arisen, from being observed in the individuals of the same species inhabiting the same confined locality, may be called individual differences. No one supposes that all the individuals of the same species are cast in the same actual mould. These individual differences are of the highest importance for us, for they are often inherited, as must be familiar to every one; and they thus afford materials for natural selection to act on and accumulate, in the same manner as man accumulates in any given direction individual differences in his domesticated productions. These individual differences generally affect what naturalists consider unimportant parts; but I could show, by a long catalogue of facts, that parts which must be called important, whether viewed under a physiological or classificatory point of view, sometimes vary in the individuals of the same species. I am convinced that the most experienced naturalist would be surprised at the number of the cases of variability, even in important parts of structure, which he could collect on good authority, as I have collected, during a course of years. It should be remembered that systematists are far from being pleased at finding variability in important characters, and that there are not many men who will laboriously examine internal and important organs, and compare them in many specimens of the same species. It would never have been expected that the branching of the main nerves close to the great central ganglion of an insect would have been variable in the same species; it might have been thought that changes of this nature could have been effected only by slow degrees; yet Sir J. Lubbock has shown a degree of variability in these main nerves in *Coccus*, which may almost be compared to the irregular branching of the stem of a tree. This philosophical naturalist, I may add, has also shown that the muscles in the larvæ of certain insects are far from uniform. Authors sometimes argue in a circle when they state that important organs never vary; for these same authors practically rank those parts as important (as some few naturalists have honestly confessed) which do not vary; and, under this point of view, no instance will ever be found of an important part varying; but under any other point of view many instances assuredly can be given.

There is one point connected with individual differences which is extremely perplexing: I refer to those genera which have been called "protean" or "polymorphic," in which species present an inordinate amount of variation. With respect to many of these forms, hardly two naturalists agree whether to rank them as species or as varieties. We may instance *Rubus*, *Rosa*, and *Hieracium* among plants, several genera of insects, and of *Brachiopod* shells. In most polymorphic genera some of the species have fixed and definite characters. Genera which are polymorphic in one country seem to be, with a few exceptions, polymorphic in other countries, and likewise, judging from *Brachiopod* shells, at former periods of time. These facts are very perplexing, for they seem to show that this kind of variability is independent of the conditions of life. I am inclined to suspect that we see, at least in some of these polymorphic genera, variations which are of no service or disservice to the species, and which consequently have not been seized on and rendered definite by natural selection, as hereafter to be explained.

Individuals of the same species often present, as is known to every one, great differences of structure, independently of variation, as in the two sexes of various animals, in the two or three castes of sterile females or workers among insects, and in the immature and larval states of many of the lower animals. There are, also, cases of dimorphism and trimorphism, both with animals and plants. Thus, Mr. Wallace, who has lately called attention to the subject, has shown that the females of certain species of butterflies, in the Malayan Archipelago, regularly appear under two or even three conspicuously

distinct forms, not connected by intermediate varieties. Fritz Muller has described analogous but more extraordinary cases with the males of certain Brazilian Crustaceans: thus, the male of a *Tanais* regularly occurs under two distinct forms; one of these has strong and differently shaped pincers, and the other has antennæ much more abundantly furnished with smelling-hairs. Although in most of these cases, the two or three forms, both with animals and plants, are not now connected by intermediate gradations, it is possible that they were once thus connected. Mr. Wallace, for instance, describes a certain butterfly which presents in the same island a great range of varieties connected by intermediate links, and the extreme links of the chain closely resemble the two forms of an allied dimorphic species inhabiting another part of the Malay Archipelago. Thus also with ants, the several worker-castes are generally quite distinct; but in some cases, as we shall hereafter see, the castes are connected together by finely graduated varieties. So it is, as I have myself observed, with some dimorphic plants. It certainly at first appears a highly remarkable fact that the same female butterfly should have the power of producing at the same time three distinct female forms and a male; and that an hermaphrodite plant should produce from the same seed-capsule three distinct hermaphrodite forms, bearing three different kinds of females and three or even six different kinds of males. Nevertheless these cases are only exaggerations of the common fact that the female produces offspring of two sexes which sometimes differ from each other in a wonderful manner.

Revision #1

Created 12 August 2019 14:48:43 by Textpedia

Updated 12 August 2019 15:02:00 by Textpedia