

Summary.

Our ignorance of the laws of variation is profound. Not in one case out of a hundred can we pretend to assign any reason why this or that part has varied. But whenever we have the means of instituting a comparison, the same laws appear to have acted in producing the lesser differences between varieties of the same species, and the greater differences between species of the same genus. Changed conditions generally induce mere fluctuating variability, but sometimes they cause direct and definite effects; and these may become strongly marked in the course of time, though we have not sufficient evidence on this head. Habit in producing constitutional peculiarities, and use in strengthening, and disuse in weakening and diminishing organs, appear in many cases to have been potent in their effects. Homologous parts tend to vary in the same manner, and homologous parts tend to cohere. Modifications in hard parts and in external parts sometimes affect softer and internal parts. When one part is largely developed, perhaps it tends to draw nourishment from the adjoining parts; and every part of the structure which can be saved without detriment will be saved. Changes of structure at an early age may affect parts subsequently developed; and many cases of correlated variation, the nature of which we are unable to understand, undoubtedly occur. Multiple parts are variable in number and in structure, perhaps arising from such parts not having been closely specialised for any particular function, so that their modifications have not been closely checked by natural selection. It follows probably from this same cause, that organic beings low in the scale are more variable than those standing higher in the scale, and which have their whole organisation more specialised. Rudimentary organs, from being useless, are not regulated by natural selection, and hence are variable. Specific characters — that is, the characters which have come to differ since the several species of the same genus branched off from a common parent — are more variable than generic characters, or those which have long been inherited, and have not differed within this same period. In these remarks we have referred to special parts or organs being still variable, because they have recently varied and thus come to differ; but we have also seen in the second chapter that the same principle applies to the whole individual; for in a district where many species of a genus are found — that is, where there has been much former variation and differentiation, or where the manufactory of new specific forms has been actively at work — in that district and among these species, we now find, on an average, most varieties. Secondary sexual characters are highly variable, and such characters differ much in the species of the same group. Variability in the same parts of the organisation has generally been taken advantage of in giving secondary sexual differences to the two sexes of the same species, and specific differences to the several species of the same genus. Any part or organ developed to an extraordinary size or in an extraordinary manner, in comparison with the same part or organ in the allied species, must have gone through an extraordinary amount of modification since the genus arose; and thus we can understand why it should often still be variable in a much higher degree than other parts; for variation is a long-continued and slow process, and natural selection will in such cases not as yet have had time to overcome the tendency to further variability and to reversion to a less modified state. But when a species with an extraordinarily developed organ has become the parent of many modified descendants — which on our view must be a very slow process, requiring a long lapse of time — in this case, natural selection has succeeded in giving a fixed character to the organ, in however extraordinary a manner it may have been developed. Species inheriting nearly the same constitution from a common parent, and exposed to similar influences, naturally tend to present analogous variations, or these same species may occasionally revert to some of the characters of their ancient progenitors. Although new and important modifications may not arise from reversion and analogous variation, such modifications will add to the beautiful and harmonious diversity of nature.

Whatever the cause may be of each slight difference between the offspring and their parents — and a cause for each must exist — we have reason to believe that it is the steady accumulation of beneficial differences which has given rise to all the more important modifications of structure in relation to the habits of each species.

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