

Transcription (from *Trove*), July 2014:

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[p. 6c]

Darwinism.— By Alfred Russel Wallace. Macmillan & Co. Mr. Russel Wallace's latest contribution to his favourite science will prove a most delightful book to the student of natural history. Not only so, but it will undoubtedly help very materially towards the clearing away of the numerous misconceptions which have rendered the very name of Darwin a signal for acrimonious controversy all over the civilised world. It was absolutely necessary that such a work as that which is now under notice should have been issued by one of the leading exponents of the theories of natural selection and evolution. Mr. Russel Wallace was in some respects an anticipator of the late Charles Darwin in several of his leading ideas, yet every shade of jealousy between the two scientists gave way before the claims of the study to which they were both so passionately devoted. Hence we find that Darwin is quoted throughout this book as the naturalist who has done incomparably the greatest work for the advancement of the study of evolution as applied to the organic world. The object of the book of course is to show that species of plants and animals which are now very distinct have been descended from common ancestors or progenitors. With this in view Mr. Wallace has focused upon his five hundred pages nearly all the light which is to be derived from the numerous writings of Darwin himself and from various other naturalists, including the author himself. Many facts are adduced to show that individual peculiarities among members of the same species are very much greater than was at one time imagined, and the graphic method of diagram is used to illustrate the results recorded. But the most interesting part of the book is that which deals with the wonderful relation between the physical peculiarities of species and their preservation from the attacks of other animals. For example, everyone has noted the peculiar fact that among birds there are many species in which the female is of very sombre colour, while the male possesses the most brilliant plumage. What is the reason of this apparently ungallant distinction? At first sight it appears to be perfectly arbitrary, more especially when it is considered that in many other species the female is equally bright in colour with the male. But when it is shown that always when the female is brightly coloured she is hidden when sitting on her eggs, while in every case of the reverse the bird sits in an open nest exposed to the attack of the first hawk whose eye may be caught by her plumage, the wonderful fitness of the order of nature is most strikingly illustrated. The sombre plumage is really the bird's best friend in the hour of her need. Space forbids us to even mention the chief of the similar proofs which are given of the absolute dependence of plants and animals upon their physical forms in the struggle for existence. Those which are the best fitted to live strong and happy lives are in almost every case the ones who in the long run are enabled to perpetuate their species. Of course it has all along been contended on the other side by anti-Darwinians that nature works not by the elimination of the unfit but by the preparation of the fit. But the whole organization of the world in which one living thing exists by preying upon another tends to contradict such a view. Nor does the struggle for existence seem to the author any evidence of cruelty in the plan upon which the world is organized; on the contrary, when one considers that the lower animals when killed nearly always die comparatively painless deaths, that they save little or no anxiety, and that the arrangements for their preservation in due proportion are the result of natural causes, one sees at once that there is far more kindness in the treatment accorded to the lower animals than men usually offer to one another. Nor is the existence of a designer of the universe for a moment denied by a theory which only seeks to elaborate some of the wonderful methods by which the design has been worked out. On this

point it is well that Mr. Wallace's own words should be quoted. He says—"We thus find that the Darwinian theory, even when carried out to its extreme logical conclusion, not only does not oppose but lends a decided support to a belief in the spiritual nature of man. It shows us how man's body may have been developed from that of a lower animal form under the law of natural selection; but it also teaches us that we possess intellectual and moral faculties which could not have been so developed, but must have had another origin, and for this origin we can only find an adequate cause in the unseen universe of spirit." The current idea that Darwinism means materialism is, therefore, an entirely erroneous one. On the contrary, Darwinism tends to emphasize the broad distinction between form and force, between soul and body, and in other departments of science exactly the same development is taking place. The nearer we get to the fundamental laws which govern the movements of matter the clearer becomes our conception of the existence of something which is not matter, and which can only be referred to the all-pervading unseen universe.

[\[Return\]](#)

*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2014.