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‘The Origin of Man.’

There was a field-day of the fellows of the Anthropological Society on Tuesday, on the oft-centered fighting ground—“the Origin of Man.” Mr. N. [*sic*] R. Wallace took the lead, by reading a paper in which he endeavoured to reconcile the contending factions who dispute about the unity or diversity of the human race; but, like many other mediators, he failed to satisfy either of the parties directly concerned, and his arguments were not of a kind to obtain favour from the outsiders, or those who are satisfied with ancient traditions. He commenced by taking for granted the yet very questionable modern dogma, that man existed before the extinction of elephants, rhinoceroses, tigers, and other tropical animals—of different species to any now living—whose remains are found imbedded in the upper geological strata of this and other European countries. As Dr. Hunt, the president of the society previously observed, there is no limitation of time since that dogma has been adopted, and speculators on the origin of man may help themselves to any quantity of it they may require. Mr. Wallace accordingly took as his minimum quantity 1,000 centuries. reserving to himself the liberty to appropriate as much more as he might subsequently desire to have. At that early period he assumed that a being appeared on the earth resembling man in the external characters of his body and [*illeg.*] but what the shape of his head might have been Mr. Wallace would not undertake to say. This creature was almost devoid of intellect and had not the power of speech, but whether he was an initial creation, or the result of transmutation from antecedent apes, did not clearly appear, though we gathered from some of his remarks that it was not by operation of transmutation; and some of the transmutationists afterwards objected on that account. This man-seeming but speechless creation was propagated over the surface of the earth, but though at first devoid of intellect it possessed the germs of intellectual faculties, which became developed by the exigencies of its position in various climates. The rigours of winter developed, in the course of ages, the power of protecting itself from cold by providing clothing for the body, and the necessity for providing food and clothing thus cultivated the mental faculties, until at length the power of speech was obtained, and the creature became a man, of the lowest type of humanity, though capable of still further development. It was the faculty of adapting himself to circumstances that gave to man the fixity of his physical frame which, Mr. Wallace considered, distinguished him from other animals. Adopting fully the Darwinian hypothesis of change of species by natural selection, he assumed that other animals, which has not the power to adapt themselves to circumstances by external contrivances, had become gradually changed to adapt their physical conditions to the alterations of climate or to other changes in the country they occupied; but, as man had the power to make provision for his varying wants, there was no necessity for changing the form of his body, and thus he remained the same in shape as originally created, amidst the changes in other animals around him. By this hypothesis Mr. Wallace assumed that the intellect of man was entirely developed by external circumstances; those who lived in a colder climate having had their mental faculties more cultivated by experiencing greater necessity to exercise them, and thus the superiority of the European races over Asiatics was attained. Mr. Wallace, in his concluding portion of his paper, cast a glance at the future progress of human development, which was delightfully Utopian. By the continuance of mental development—though under what exciting causes was not specified—all mankind would [*illeg.*] become alike, they would learn to regulate their passions and desires to the best advantage to themselves and

others; there would be no necessity for governments, for all the peoples would be able to govern themselves; Asiatics, Americans, negros, and Europeans would be --nally intelligent and virtuous, and the whole earth would become a paradise.

A very animated discussion took place after the reading of the paper, in which Mr. Burke, Mr. G. Witt, Mr. Pusey, Mr. T. Bendyshe, Mr. Reddie, Mr. C. C. Blake, and Dr. Hunt took part. Not one of the speakers, however, agreed with Mr. Wallace, whose attempt to reconcile differences of opinion seemed to result in making them concur only in dissenting from his hypothesis on various grounds.

After a long reply from Mr. Wallace to the objections [*illeg.*] by the different speakers, the meeting adjourned.

The Alfred Russel Wallace Page, Charles H. Smith, 2017.