

Transcription (from IAPSOP), September 2017:

Light (London) 31(1570) (11 February 1911): 71b (Louisa Bigg).

[p. 71b]

‘Is Nature Cruel?’

Sir—In *Light* of January 28th, under the heading ‘Is Nature Cruel?’ you allude to Dr. A. R. Wallace’s views on the comparative insensibility of animals to pain as ‘enlightening and consoling.’ Possibly they may be so to the vivisector, but to the lover of animals they seem not only doubtful and conjectural, but highly dangerous.

‘Our whole tendency to transfer our sensations of pain to all other animals is grossly misleading,’ says Dr. Wallace, but one powerful reason for believing that the higher animals suffer much as we do is that the signs of their pain are identical with our own. The sharp cry of anguish, the moan of continued suffering, the drawn and haggard face, the wasted form, leave us little room for any comfortable hypothesis as to their lack of sensitiveness.

I can well understand that a humane man like Dr. Wallace is ‘thankful’ to be able to believe that animals suffer less atrociously than we imagine, but I regret that he and others should, with good intentions, prepare so handy a weapon for the cruel and callous. If the higher animals suffer in much less degree than man, they must be consummate actors.

Before concluding that even ‘the poor beetle’ feels no pain in dying, one would like to hear his side of the story. ‘The poet’ was not in the habit of writing nonsense.

—Yours, &c., Louisa Bigg.

[Everyone must judge for himself the soundness of the inference which Dr. Wallace drew from the evolutionary law which he stated and which we cited. We agree that the animals near to the human probably suffer as much as we do, and possibly more in some respects, as being incapable of the alleviations of our philosophy: but then they are probably exempt from the exaggerations which accompany our faculty of comparison and our excessive self-love. Dr. Wallace nobly guarded himself against the vivisector, as we showed. —Ed. *Light*.]

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