

Darwin, C. R. 1871. The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex. London: John Murray. Volume 1. 1st edition.

Accessed at <http://darwin-online.org.uk/> on April 1, 2008 (Bolded text not original)

We have now seen that the characteristic differences between the races of man cannot be accounted for in a satisfactory manner by the direct action of the conditions of life, nor by the effects of the continued use of parts, nor through the principle of correlation. We are therefore led to inquire whether slight individual differences, to which man is eminently liable, may not have been preserved and augmented during a long series of generations through natural selection. **But here we are at once met by the objection that beneficial variations alone can be thus preserved; and as far as we are enabled to judge (although always liable to error on this head) not one of the external differences between the races of man are of any direct or special service to him.** The intellectual and moral or social faculties must of course be excepted from this remark; but differences in these faculties can have had little or no influence on external characters. The variability of all the characteristic differences between the races, before referred to, likewise indicates that these differences cannot be of much importance; for, had they been important, they would long ago have been either fixed and preserved, or eliminated. In this respect man resembles those forms, called by naturalists protean or polymorphic, which have remained extremely variable, owing, as it seems, to their variations being of an indifferent nature, and consequently to their having escaped the action of natural selection.

We have thus far been baffled in all our attempts to account for the differences between the races of man; but there remains one important agency, namely Sexual Selection, which appears to have acted as powerfully on man, as on many other animals.

Chapter 8

WITH animals which have their sexes separated, the males necessarily differ from the females in their organs of reproduction; and these afford the primary sexual characters. **But the sexes often differ in what Hunter has called secondary sexual characters, which are not directly connected with the act of reproduction;** for instance, in the male possessing certain organs of sense or locomotion, of which the female is quite destitute, or in having them more highly-developed, in order that he may readily find or reach her; or again, in the male having special organs of prehension so as to hold her securely. These latter organs of infinitely diversified kinds graduate into, and in some cases can hardly be distinguished from, those which are commonly ranked as primary, such as the complex appendages at the apex of the abdomen in male insects. Unless indeed we confine the term "primary" to the reproductive glands, it is scarcely possible to decide, as far as the organs of prehension are concerned, which ought to be called primary and which secondary.

The female often differs from the male in having organs for the nourishment or protection of her young, as the mammary glands of mammals, and the abdominal sacks of the marsupials. The male, also, in some few cases differs from the female in possessing analogous organs, as the receptacles for the ova possessed by the males of certain fishes, and those temporarily developed in certain male frogs. Female bees have a special apparatus for collecting and carrying pollen, and their ovipositor is modified into a sting for the defence of their larvæ and the community. In the females of many insects the ovipositor is modified in the most complex manner for the safe placing of the eggs. Numerous similar cases could be given, but they do not here concern us. **There are, however, other sexual differences quite disconnected with the primary organs with which we are more especially concerned—such as the greater size, strength, and**

pugnacity of the male, his weapons of offence or means of defence against rivals, his gaudy colouring and various ornaments, his power of song, and other such characters.

Besides the foregoing primary and secondary sexual differences, the male and female sometimes differ in structures connected with different habits of life, and not at all, or only indirectly, related to the reproductive functions. Thus the females of certain flies (Culicidæ and Tabanidæ) are blood-suckers, whilst the males live on flowers and have their mouths destitute of mandibles.¹ The males alone of certain moths and of some crustaceans (e.g. *Tanais*) have imperfect, closed mouths, and cannot feed. The Complementary males of certain cirripedes live like epiphytic plants either on the female or hermaphrodite form, and are destitute of a mouth and prehensile limbs. In these cases it is the male which has been modified and has lost certain important organs, which the other members of the same group possess. In other cases it is the female which has lost such parts; for instance, the female glowworm is destitute of wings, as are many female moths, some of which never leave their cocoons. Many female parasitic crustaceans have lost their natatory legs. In some weevil-beetles (Curculionidæ) there is a great difference between the male and female in the length of the rostrum or snout;² but the meaning of this and of many analogous differences, is not at all understood. Differences of structure between the two sexes in relation to different habits of life are generally confined to the lower animals; but with some few birds the beak of the male differs from that of the female. No doubt in most, but apparently not in all these cases, the differences are indirectly connected with the propagation of the species: thus a female which has to nourish a multitude of ova will require more food than the male, and consequently will require special means for procuring it. A male animal which lived for a very short time might without detriment lose through disuse its organs for procuring food; but he would retain his locomotive organs in a perfect state, so that he might reach the female. The female, on the other hand, might safely lose her organs for flying, swimming, or walking, if she gradually acquired habits which rendered such powers useless.

We are, however, here concerned only with that kind of selection, which I have called sexual selection. This depends on the advantage which certain individuals have over other individuals of the same sex and species, in exclusive relation to reproduction. When the two sexes differ in structure in relation to different habits of life, as in the cases above mentioned, they have no doubt been modified through natural selection, accompanied by inheritance limited to one and the same sex. So again the primary sexual organs, and those for nourishing or protecting the young, come under this same head; for those individuals which generated or nourished their offspring best, would leave, *cæteris paribus*, the greatest number to inherit their superiority; whilst those which generated or nourished their offspring badly, would leave but few to inherit their weaker powers. As the male has to search for the female, he requires for this purpose organs of sense and locomotion, but if these organs are necessary for the other purposes of life, as is generally the case, they will have been developed through natural selection. When the male has found the female he sometimes absolutely requires prehensile organs to hold her; thus Dr. Wallace informs me that the males of certain moths cannot unite with the females if their tarsi or feet are broken. The males of many oceanic crustaceans have their legs and antennæ modified in an extraordinary manner for the prehension of the female; hence we may suspect that owing to these animals being washed about by the waves of the open sea, they absolutely require these organs in order to propagate their kind, and if so their development will have been the result of ordinary or natural selection.

When the two sexes follow exactly the same habits of life, and the male has more highly developed sense or locomotive organs than the female, it may be that these in their perfected state are indispensable to the male for finding the female; but in the vast majority of cases, they serve only to give one male an advantage over another, for the less well-endowed males, if time were

allowed them, would succeed in pairing with the females; and they would in all other respects, judging from the structure of the female, be equally well adapted for their ordinary habits of life. In such cases sexual selection must have come into action, for the males have acquired their present structure, not from being better fitted to survive in the struggle for existence, but from having gained an advantage over other males, and from having transmitted this advantage to their male offspring alone. It was the importance of this distinction which led me to designate this form of selection as sexual selection. **So again, if the chief service rendered to the male by his prehensile organs is to prevent the escape of the female before the arrival of other males, or when assaulted by them, these organs will have been perfected through sexual selection, that is by the advantage acquired by certain males over their rivals.** But in most cases it is scarcely possible to distinguish between the effects of natural and sexual selection. Whole chapters could easily be filled with details on the differences between the sexes in their sensory, locomotive, and prehensile organs. As, however, these structures are not more interesting than others adapted for the ordinary purposes of life, I shall almost pass them over, giving only a few instances under each class.

There are many other structures and instincts which must have been developed through sexual selection—such as the weapons of offence and the means of defence possessed by the males for fighting with and driving away their rivals—their courage and pugnacity—their ornaments of many kinds—their organs for producing vocal or instrumental music—and their glands for emitting odours; **most of these latter structures serving only to allure or excite the female. That these characters are the result of sexual and not of ordinary selection is clear, as unarmed, unornamented, or unattractive males would succeed equally well in the battle for life and in leaving a numerous progeny, if better endowed males were not present.** We may infer that this would be the case, for the females, which are unarmed and unornamented, are able to survive and procreate their kind. **Secondary sexual characters of the kind just referred to, will be fully discussed in the following chapters, as they are in many respects interesting, but more especially as they depend on the will, choice, and rivalry of the individuals of either sex.** When we behold two males fighting for the possession of the female, or several male birds displaying their gorgeous plumage, and performing the strangest antics before an assembled body of females, we cannot doubt that, though led by instinct, they know what they are about, and consciously exert their mental and bodily powers.

In the same manner as man can improve the breed of his game-cocks by the selection of those birds which are victorious in the cockpit, so it appears that the strongest and most vigorous males, or those provided with the best weapons, have prevailed under nature, and have led to the improvement of the natural breed or species. Through repeated deadly contests, a slight degree of variability, if it led to some advantage, however slight, would suffice for the work of sexual selection; and it is certain that secondary sexual characters are eminently variable. In the same manner as man can give beauty, according to his standard of taste, to his male poultry—can give to the Sebright bantam a new and elegant plumage, an erect and peculiar carriage—**so it appears that in a state of nature female birds, by having long selected the more attractive males, have added to their beauty. No doubt this implies powers of discrimination and taste on the part of the female which will at first appear extremely improbable; but I hope hereafter to shew that this is not the case.**