

I have discussed this subject of analogous variation at considerable length, because it is well known that the varieties of one species frequently resemble distinct species—a fact in perfect harmony with the foregoing cases, and explicable on the theory of descent. Secondly, because these facts are important from showing, as remarked in a former chapter, that each trifling variation is governed by law, and is determined in a much higher degree by the nature of the organisation, than by the nature of the conditions to which the varying being has been exposed. Thirdly, because these facts are to a certain extent related to a more general law, namely, that which Mr. B. D. Walsh³⁰ has called the “Law of *Equable Variability*,” or, as he explains it, “if any given character is very variable in one species of a group, it will tend to be variable in allied species; and if any given character is perfectly constant in one species of a group, it will tend to be constant in allied species.”

This leads me to recall a discussion in the chapter on Selection, in which it was shown that with domestic races, which are now undergoing rapid improvement, those parts or characters vary the most, which are the most valued. This naturally follows from recently selected characters continually tending to revert to their former less improved standard, and from their being still acted on by the same agencies, whatever these may be, which first caused the characters in question to vary. The same principle is applicable to natural species, for, as stated in my ‘Origin of Species,’ generic characters are less variable than specific characters; and the latter are those which have been modified by variation and natural selection, since the period when all the species belonging to the genus branched off from a common progenitor, whilst generic characters are those which have remained unaltered from a much more remote epoch, and accordingly are now less variable. This statement makes a near approach to Mr. Walsh’s law of *Equable Variability*. Secondary sexual characters, it may be added, rarely serve to characterise distinct genera, for they usually differ much in the species of the same genus, and they are highly variable

³⁰ ‘Proc. Entomolog. Soc. of Philadelphia,’ Oct. 1863, p. 213.