

---

Mr. Wallace has conferred a benefit on the world at large by publishing in a handy volume\* ten essays, of which nine have been previously printed in as many different journals, while the tenth now appears for the first time. Most of these, valuable and interesting as they are, lie beside our path; for we have always looked upon what the Germans have taken to call "*Darwinismus*" as not coming properly within the scope of 'The Ibis.' Three of these dissertations, however, will, we are sure, be read or re-read with pleasure by all ornithologists, even though they do not agree with the author; and these are the Third, Sixth, and Seventh of the series as now arranged. To be critical, we must mention that some of the author's assertions seem open to grave objection. Cordially agreeing, as we do, with the general argument in the essay on "Mimicry," we cannot understand Mr. Wallace citing as a case in point (pp. 53, 54) such a statement as this:—"The wood-dove, when perched among the branches of its favourite *fir*, is scarcely discernible; whereas were it among some lighter foliage, the blue and purple tints in its plumage would far sooner betray it." There is no reason to suppose that predatory animals are "colour blind," and indeed all Mr. Wallace's argument would fall to the ground if they were; but we think his authority must have been so afflicted; for what is more unlike the green of any species of *fir* with which we are acquainted than the "blue and purple tints" which make up dove-colour we do not easily conceive; and certainly, according to our own experience, a Pigeon is more conspicuous on any of the dark and commoner *firs* than on a *beech*, an *oak* or an *elm*. Our author's long sojournings in foreign parts must, too, have caused him to forget his birds'-nesting days at home; for he says (p. 216):—"The lark frequents cultivated fields, and makes its nest, on the ground, of grass lined

\* Contributions to the theory of Natural Selection. A series of essays. By ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE. London: 1870. 8vo, pp. 384.

with *horsehair*." Now we suppose he is here referring to *Alauda arvensis*—emphatically *the* Lark of this country ; and we can only say that if we had found such a nest, we should have been exceedingly surprised at learning that it belonged to a Sky-Lark. Again, according to Mr. Wallace (p. 229), the Golden-crested Wren, in exposed situations, builds "a perfect domed nest with a side entrance," which is something we have never seen and certainly never expect to see from this bird. Once more, had our author ever examined the nest of a Waxwing, and traversed the northern forests wherein it breeds—which we suppose he has not, we think he would not have talked (pp. 255, 256) of the harmony of the colours of the bird's plumage and of the black or iron-grey lichens which compose or bedeck its nest. These, no doubt, effectually help to conceal it from hostile eyes ; but we feel sure that there is nothing in the material of the structure or the surrounding vegetation that at all resembles the brighter colours of the occupant. So much of what is advanced in Mr. Wallace's "Philosophy" and "Theory of Birds' Nests" is undeniably true, that we the more regret his calling into court evidence which can be shown to be untrustworthy ; for such cannot fail to deteriorate the effect of that which is to be unreservedly believed, and his case generally is far too strong to require the aid of doubtful testimony. We say thus much without pledging ourselves to the full acceptance of his views as set forth in the Sixth and Seventh Essays. Aply and fairly as he argues, we think there is a good deal to be brought forward on the other side, and for ourselves we should prefer suspending our judgment on the questions involved.

---