



# **Materials for the Study of Variation: Treated With Especial Regard to Discontinuity in the Origin of Species (Classic Reprint)**

*William Bateson*

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Excerpt from Materials for the Study of Variation: Treated With Especial Regard to Discontinuity in the Origin of Species

Some years ago it was my fortune to be engaged in an investigation of the anatomy and development of *Balanoglossus*. At the close of that investigation it became necessary to analyze the meaning of the facts obtained, and especially to shew their bearing upon those questions of relationship and descent which modern morphology has attempted to answer. To this task I set myself as I best might, using the common methods of morphological argument and interpretation, and working all the facts into a scheme which should be as consistent as I could make it.


But the value of this and of all such schemes, by which each form is duly ushered to its place, rests wholly on the hypothesis that the methods of argument are sound. Over it all hung the suspicion that they were not sound. This suspicion seemed at that time so strong that in preface to what I had to say I felt obliged to refer to it, and to state explicitly that the analysis was undertaken in pursuance of the current methods of morphological criticism, and without prejudging the question of possible or even probable error in those methods.

Any one who has had to do such work must have felt the same thing. In these discussions we are continually stopped by such phrases as, "if such and such a variation then took place and was favourable," or, we may easily suppose circumstances in which such and such a variation if it occurred might be beneficial, and the like. The whole argument is based on such assumptions as these - assumptions which, were they found in the arguments of Paley or of Butler, we could not too scornfully ridicule.

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