

Transcription (from *Trove*), July 2014:

Sydney Morning Herald (Australia) No. 22820 (4 March 1911): 4c-4d (anon.).

[p. 4c]

‘The Ideas of Wallace.’

In “The World of Life,” Alfred Russel Wallace gives us his latest, and, we hope, his final, views about the universe. He regards it, on the title page, as a manifestation of creative power, directive mind, and ultimate purpose. In this volume he tells us he attempts to summarise his half-century of thought and work, and it is with a full knowledge of the importance of that work that we are regretfully obliged to speak with disrespect of the present extraordinary farrago of fads and foibles. What Wallace has to say about the distribution of plants and animals is still worth reading; but he soon gets woefully off the track even when discussing recognition works. In these portions of the volume there is naturally a good deal about Darwinism, and a satisfactory popular exposition of some of its salient facts; but he is now forced, by the highly elaborated wing scales of Lepidoptera, to believe in a consciously directed evolution. He is further convinced, in the preface, that man is the one crowning product of the whole cosmic process of life-development, though, in the conclusion, he expresses his belief in a series of beings intermediate between ourselves and divinity. A more ludicrous revival of anthropomorphism it would be difficult to imagine. Mr. Wallace is further convinced that nature is not red in tooth and claw, and that vivisectionists represent one end of the human gamut, and vegetarians the other. Like *Candide*, however, he is fully convinced that we live in the best possible world, and he gives a convincing metaphysical explanation of the presence of undesirables in it. It is true that he has to denounce the female wearers of birds’ feathers, which he says is a crime against God and man, but he looks forward to the time when a “purer Christianity” will not tolerate the presence of ostrich plumes in church. He also tells us, as his mature conviction, that our great cities are the disease products of humanity, and that until they are abolished there can be no approach to a true civilization. As this abolition is so devoutly to be wished, Mr. Wallace takes the opportunity of showing how it could be done. The House of Commons and the London County Council have only to put their foot, or feet, down, and refuse to allow any further water supply to be provided. What could be simpler than that. In a “suggestion as to nuts,” Mr. Wallace reaches the conclusion that they were meant to be eaten. Let not the light-hearted reader think that this is a joke; it is a tragedy, involving the whole doctrine of evolution in chaos. Perhaps, however, we had better leave science alone and explain briefly Mr. Wallace’s theory of the angels and their work. Since matter and force are posited as eternal, it is clear that in infinite time they must have produced gods of infinite degrees of power, any one of whom would presumably be quite capable of starting such a solar system as ours, or one immensely larger and better. Thus, atheists are computed out of materialism. Mr. Wallace himself does not think matter and force are eternal. He thinks they are the product of mind. After quoting the distribution of minerals as a sure argument for design Mr. Wallace explains that “the vast, the infinite chasm between ourselves and Deity is to some extent occupied by an almost infinite series of grades of beings, each successive grade having higher and higher powers in regard to the origination, the development, and the control of the universe. The Infinite Being first, by telepathy, impressed it on the minds of the very highest angels to create by their will-power the primal universe of the ether with all those inherent properties and forces necessary for what was to follow. Then the next subordinate angels so acted on the ether as to develop from it in suitable masses and at suitable distances the various

elements of matter. The same or a subordinate body of spirit workers infused life into certain life centres, and other organising spirits then took up the business of directing evolution along certain definite channels. At successive stages of development more and perhaps higher angels might be required. This suggestion, I venture to hope, will appeal to my readers as the best approximation we are now able to formulate as to the deeper, the more fundamental causes of matter and force of life and consciousness and of Man himself, at his best already a little lower than the angels, and, like them, destined to a permanent progressive existence in a World of Spirit.”

(Dymock.)

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The Alfred Russel Wallace Page, Charles H. Smith, 2014.