

# The World of Life

**I**N 1904 Mr Alfred Russell Wallace published his work, *Man's Place in the Universe*, and now, as a sequel and complement to it, on the threshold of his ninetieth year he gives to the reading public *The World of Life* (London: Chapman & Hall. 1910), a book which will certainly give rise to much controversy in scientific circles. The object of the first-named work was to show that our earth is the only inhabited planet, not only in the Solar System but in the whole stellar universe. Mr Wallace complains, in the preface to the work under review, that numerous critics treated the conclusions which he arrived at "as if they were wholly matters of opinion or imagination, and founded (as were their own) on personal likes or dislikes, without any appeal to evidence or to reasoning. This," he continues, "is not a method which I have adopted in any of my works" (p. viii). The present work includes a number of interesting observations and conclusions of a purely biological importance over which we will not linger, though they are well worthy of careful consideration. It is over the philosophical conclusions that discussion will most actively rage, and these conclusions may thus be summarized in the author's own words. "If there is a ruling and creative power to which the existence of our cosmos is due, and if WE are its one and unique highest outcome, able to understand and make use of the forces and products of Nature in a way that no other animal has been able to do; and if, further, there is any reasonable probability of a continuous life for us, in which we may still further develop that higher spiritual nature which we possess, then we have a perfect right, on logical and scientific grounds, to see in the infinitely varied products of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, which we alone can and do make use of, a preparation for ourselves, to assist in our mental development, and to fit us for a progressively higher state of existence as spiritual beings" (p. 334).

The author makes it quite clear that in his opinion the qualifying "ifs" in the above quotation may be eliminated. He shows that vegetable growths, even the dif-

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ferent kinds of woods, find their best explanation in their fitness for the use of man. "Had no wood existed suitable for sea-going vessels, the whole course of history, and perhaps of civilization, would have been different" (p. 326). The same may be said of many of the metals (p. 360) and even of water and its remarkable characteristics (p. 366). The whole system of life-development is that of the lower providing food for the higher, and it has "succeeded marvellously, even gloriously, inasmuch as it has produced, as its final outcome, MAN, the one being who can appreciate the infinite variety and beauty of the life-world, the one being who can utilize in any adequate manner the myriad products of its mechanics and its chemistry" (p. 373). Further and careful consideration of nature as we know it, and more particularly of the prolonged and complicated processes which have led up to the development of the condition of things with which we are acquainted, including the existence of man and his domination over the animate and inanimate objects by which he is surrounded, all these things, in the writer's opinion, afford "an exceedingly powerful argument for an over-ruling MIND, which so ordered the forces at work in the material universe as to render the almost infinitely improbable sequence of events to which I have called attention an actual reality" (p. 186). The same thesis is upheld in various other passages throughout the book which considerations of space will not allow us to quote in full. Reference must, however, be made to the passage in which the author combats the view that the universe is eternal and self-existent, and asks whether such an explanation is "easier, simpler, more rational, more scientific, more philosophical, than to posit *one* supreme MIND as self-existent and eternal, of which our universe and all universes are the manifestations, and yet the 'infinity and eternity men' call themselves 'monists,' and claim to be the only logical and scientific thinkers. With them matter, ether, life—(surely *three* absolutely distinct things)—with all the wonderful laws, and forces, and directive agencies which they imply, and

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without which none of them could for a moment exist, all are to be accounted for and explained by the one illogical assumption, their eternity; the one complete misnomer, monism; the one alleged fundamental law which explains nothing, the 'law of substance'" (p. 353). It may be gathered, from what has been quoted, that the author has no sympathy with the chemico-physical explanation of the phenomena of life, and those desirous of a simple refutation of that view of things may be referred to his admirable "allegory" (p. 296), which we cannot find space for here. Brief reference may also be made to the manner in which what Huxley called "gratuitous gifts," such as the appreciation of scenery or of music, are handled and used, as the author has elsewhere and previously used them as powerful arguments for "a benevolent Author of the Universe" (p. 324 and see also p. 312). Reference may also be directed to the sections dealing with the explanation of the existence of pain (pp. 371-2). Whilst fully recognizing the existence of a Creator, the author thinks that the actual operations of creation may have been carried out by intermediate discarnate beings, which never were incarnate. At first sight one would imagine this to allude to the commonly received heavenly hierarchy, but this does not seem to be the author's meaning; in fact he speaks of the existence of such beings "as attendants and messengers of the Deity" as being an irrational idea (p. 393), and seems to indicate that the spiritual beings whom he postulates have themselves taken part in the work of creation. It must be admitted that this portion of the book is rather vague and lacks the clearness and force of the earlier sections from which we have quoted. In conclusion, as a curiosity, a single word, surely the longest ever conceived, may be quoted "octamethyltetraminodihydroxiparadixanthylbezonetetracarboxylic acid." This throws into the shade Mark Twain's well-known example, and even the Welsh place commonly shortened into Llanfair P.G. must hide its diminished head before this awful concatenation of syllables.

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