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New York American, 16 September 1911? (anon.).

‘Alfred Russel Wallace’s Remarkable Discussion of Life.’

Alfred Russel Wallace, author of “Man’s Place in the Universe,” is the discoverer who simultaneously with Darwin announced to the world the theory of evolution, a theory which has been a master-key in unlocking the secrets of the creative process.

It will be remembered that Wallace was on the eve of publishing a brief monograph on evolution, but generously stepped aside in order that his friend Darwin might be the first to announce this great scientific doctrine to the world.¹ Wallace thought it right to do this, because Darwin had prepared a more elaborate presentation of the idea. This self-forgetting generosity on the part of Wallace has but few parallels in the history of mankind.

In “The World of Life” Dr. Wallace’s last book, this distinguished scientist summarizes a half-century of work along the line of evolution, explaining the scope and application of the idea, asserting that it covers many of the phenomenon of living things hitherto considered outside its range. After reviewing the botanical and geological record of the globe, he takes up some curious problems of natural selection among birds and insects. Here, in a most interesting dissertation, he makes a deduction that is somewhat sensational (as subverting our established belief to the contrary), a deduction that the marking and coloring of insects has not come about through their sign perceptions, but chiefly for the delight of higher beings.

Dr. Wallace takes up several basic problems that Darwin considered outside the bounds of the Darwinism theory—large questions concerning the nature and causes of life itself, and especially of its mysterious powers of growth and reproduction.

Studying the marvels of organized life, Dr. Wallace declares that life would be impossible without a Creative Power and a directive Mind and an ultimate purpose. He reinforces this decision with proofs from the natural world that pass beyond the pale of chance and coincidence.

Dr. Wallace’s mind, chained to the earth by a thousand filaments, also reaches out with lofty imagination in to the unseen. Summing up his chapter on the origin of life he nobly says:

“If, as I here suggest, the whole purport of the material universe (our universe) is the development of spiritual beings who, in the infinite variety of their natures—what we term their characters—shall to some extent reflect that infinite variety of the whole inorganic and organic worlds through which they have been developed; and if we further suppose (as we must suppose if we owe our existence to Deity) that such variety of character could have been produced in no other way; then we may reasonably suppose that there may have been a vast system of co-operation of many grades of being, from a very high grade of power and intelligence down to those unconscious or almost unconscious ‘cell-souls’ posited by Haeckel and which, I quite admit, seem to be essential coadjutors in the process of life-development.

“Now, granting all this, and granting, further, that each grade of being would be, for such a purpose as this, supreme over all beings of lower grade, who would carry out their orders or ideas with the most delighted and intelligent obedience, I can imagine the supreme, the Infinite being, foreseeing and determining the broad outlines of a universe which would, in due course and with efficient guidance,

produce the required result. He might, for instance, impress a sufficient number of his highest angels to create by their will power the primal universe of ether, with all those inherent properties and forces necessary for what was to follow. Using this as vehicle, the next subordinate association of angels would so act upon the ether as to develop from it, in suitable masses and at suitable distances, the various elements of matter, which under the influence of such laws and forces as gravitation, heat and electricity would thenceforth begin to form those vast systems of nebulae and suns which constitute our stellar universe.”

The chapter on the Purpose of Pain discusses suffering in the animal world as a thing subordinate to the law of utility. The lowest animals, whose numbers are enormous and whose lives are ephemeral, do not suffer pain, as pain would be useless in their development. As an organism increases in complexity, in duration of life and in exposure to danger, only then does pain have meaning.

Dr. Wallace does not put forward his conclusions as final; but as the best approximations we can now offer concerning matter and force and the progressive existence of a world of spirit.

His book reinforces faith in the Unapparent, bringing data from science to place beside the facts of revelation and intuition. Dr. Wallace’s volume is a rich treasury of research and reflection.

Let the earnest student put this book by the side of Fiske’s “Through Nature to God,” Le Conte’s “Evolution in Its Relation to Religious Thought,” and Winchell’s “Reconciliation of Science and Religion.”

(Moffat, Yard & Co., Publishers, New York. \$3.50.)

Editor’s Note

¹This is a triple distortion of the facts: Wallace was on no such “eve,” did not “step aside,” and was not at that point a “friend” of Darwin’s.

The Alfred Russel Wallace Page, Charles H. Smith, 2017.