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[p. 8d]

‘Other Worlds: The Peopled Planets Question.’

SOME HIGH AUTHORITIES.

The theory that our earth is the only inhabited world, set forth with the authority of Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, may well be said to have astonished the most eminent thinkers in modern science, and the views now communicated to the “Daily Mail” by Sir Oliver Lodge and other notable men will be read with great interest. “Man’s Place in the Universe,” the book in which Dr. Wallace expounded his theory, was reviewed in these columns on the day of its publication by the Bishop of Ripon, and we are able to present our readers with a delightful letter from another eminent dignitary in the English Church, whose modesty, however, forbids our revealing his identity. Here is his view of Dr. Wallace’s theory:—

I am absolutely incompetent in this matter of speculation as to the position of the earth in the great world.

I suppose it is always fascinating to put oneself in the centre point of the world. I am sure we are always doing it in the small circle in which we rotate. One is boundlessly self-satisfied.

But here, and in many other matters, I dare not do more than dream. As Lord Salisbury said of alarmists years ago, “Let them get some large maps and learn from them.” I should like to feel that one was learning something from the infinite geography of the stellar infinities.

But I dare not have a theory.

BY SIR OLIVER LODGE.

The views of the distinguished Principal of Birmingham University have a special value and interest. Sir Oliver Lodge writes:—

In so far as Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace points out the delicate planetary adjustments necessary for the support of terrestrial human life, and the remarkable character of the long ages of preparation in thought which the earth had gone before this result was achieved; in so far also as he emphasises the fact that we can now take our share in consciously improving the conditions, and in providing not only pure water, but pure and smokeless air, for every inhabitant of the British Isles, I am heartily with him.

But when he goes on to argue that the earth is probably the only inhabited planet in space, I entirely fail to follow him. It may indeed be the only inhabited planet of the solar system; that is not improbable, because for by far the greater part of the earth’s history it was, in the human sense, “uninhabited.” The period of man’s existence on it is comparatively short, and so it may be said that taking any planet at random the probabilities are strongly against its being in a state at all corresponding to what may be called a human period.

But to suppose that of all the myriads of solid bodies in space this particular lump of matter is the only one inhabited by intelligent beings seems to me—if, with all due respect to so great a man, I may so express it—absurd.

I say nothing about Dr. Wallace's biological arguments, but I feel bound to say that his astronomical arguments appear to me to be of a futile description; and I would urge that whether we happen to be somewhere near the middle of the Milky Way cluster, or in some other part of it, at the present time, is a matter which makes no difference at all.

The only aggravation that we effectively feel is the gravitation of the earth; the only active radiation is the radiation of the sun; and what our relation may be to the almost infinitely distant stellar components of our cluster is absolutely beside the mark, in my judgment, since they exert no perceptible influence at all, except on our minds and intelligence; and their influence there is to suggest enormous possibilities of other existences than our own.

BY MR. H. G. WELLS.

Mr. Wells, the master-spirit of Anticipation, has no belief at all in the new theory. He says:

The question Dr. Wallace raises is altogether too fantastic for me. I know of no facts upon which a man can base either belief or denial in the matter.

Dr. Wallace neither proves nor disproves anything, and for my own part I am quite content to go on neither holding nor contradicting anything of the sort. It seems to me that it would be equally interesting and profitable to debate whether the general outline of the material universe is, or is not, exactly that of a common shanked metal button or of a saucepan-lid, and whether one could find anything precisely like a watch-key in extra-terrestrial space.

They did this sort of thing very much better in the middle ages, when they would bring all the resources of science to determine how many angels can stand upon the point of a needle.

BY SIR WILLIAM RAMSAY.

Sir William Ramsay, Professor of Chemistry at University College, London, writes:

I do not see the use of arguments where facts, the only possible premises, are wholly lacking.

But perhaps the following considerations may interest your readers—Animal organisms consist mostly of carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, phosphorous, calcium, and sulphur: the compounds which these elements build up in living matter are conditioned so as to be moderately stable in a moist atmosphere—that is, in presence of oxygen and water.

The spectroscope tells us that the sun consists, generally speaking, of the same elements as those of which the planets are built; and we have also spectroscopic evidence that some stars other than the sun consist of nearly the same elements.

It may be inferred that their planets are more or less like our earth; it is also likely that many of them among the legions which doubtless exist have a temperature comparable with that of our earth, and, if so,

they may well be inhabited by organisms like our animals and man. On the whole, the probability is in favor of this notion: it is by no means absurd.

Again, we know of consciousness only in association with carbon compounds such as we and our fellow-creatures (in the widest sense of that word) consist of; but is there anything to hinder consciousness from being associated with beings constructed of compounds of other elements, capable of existing at temperatures at which we should cease to exist?

And, again, is there anything absurd in supposing that consciousness may exist associated with forms of matter the existence of which we are just beginning to suspect? The fact is, we know next to nothing: moreover, all we know is necessarily related to ourselves, in so far as it is a formation of our minds, as well as of objects external to us. Whether objects would appear the same to minds differently constructed, with sense channels which we possess, is a question which may well be raised.

Imagine a being with senses capable of recognising and interpreting longer or shorter ethereal waves than those which we react to; what would the world and nature appear to such a one? Totally different. Yet it is quite within the possibility that organisms formed of elements other than those we are made of might be capable of existence, with different sense-channels.

I should have thought that Dr. Wallace whose belief in an “unseen universe” is well known, would have been the last man to write such a book as “Man’s Place in the Universe.”—Daily Mail.”

[\[Return\]](#)

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