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## ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE'S CONCEPTION OF A DIVINE HIERARCHY

**T**HE book of the hour in the religious world is Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace's "World of Life."\* Its main contentions are arousing international discussion. Dr. Wallace, who was co-discoverer of the theory of evolution with Charles Darwin and is now eighty-eight years old, has made a confession of faith which shows affinities with that of the late William James. Like the champion of pragmatism, he is something of a pluralist. He believes not in one god, but in many.

Darwin, as appears in the chapter on religion in his "Life and Letters," felt that the universe could not have come into being without an intelligent cause, but thought that the human mind had not powers equal to any adequate conception of that cause. Herbert Spencer admitted the idea of a "universal immanent force" as the cause of material and mental phenomena, and the "unknown reality" which underlies both spirit and matter. Dr. Wallace accepts and enforces these views, but carries them farther. He thinks it possible

to "form some conceptions of the powers at work in Nature which help us to overcome the insuperable difficulty as to the nature of the Infinite and Absolute Creator of all that exists or can exist in infinite space." He says:

"With Professor Haeckel's dislike of the dogmas of theologians and their claims to absolute knowledge of the nature and attributes of the inscrutable mind that is the power within and behind and around nature, many of us have the greatest sympathy; but we have none with his unfounded dogmatism of combined negation and omniscience, and more especially when this assumption of superior knowledge seems to be put forward to conceal his real ignorance of the nature of life itself. As Professor Weismann well puts it, the causes and mechanism by which it comes about that the infinitely varied materials of which organisms are built up 'are always in the right place, and develop into cells at the right time,' are never touched upon in the various theories of heredity that have been put forward, and least of all in that of Haeckel, who comes before us with what he claims to be a solution of the Riddle of the Universe."

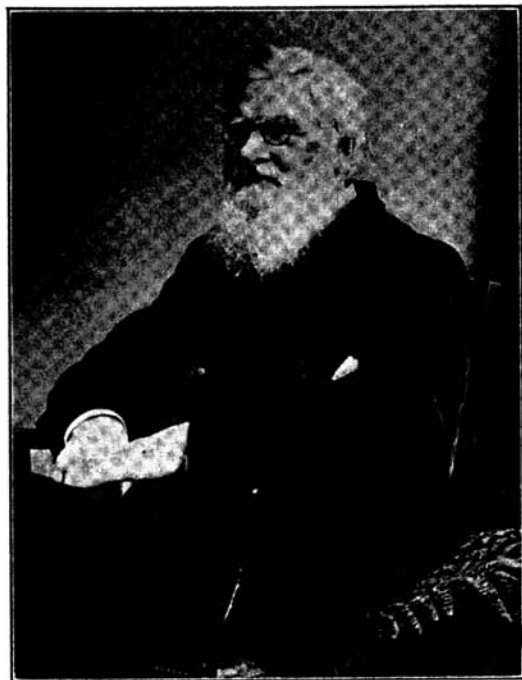
Upon this cellular selection Dr. Wallace bases his amazing conclusion that not only a

\* THE WORLD OF LIFE: A MANIFESTATION OF CREATIVE POWER, DIRECTIVE MIND AND ULTIMATE PURPOSE. By Alfred Russel Wallace. London: Chapman & Hall.

god, but demi-gods, exist. "His philosophy," says Reginald R. Buckley, a writer in *T. P.'s Weekly* (London), "seems to be midway between the Raja Yoga conceptions and scientific evolution."

To claim the Infinite and Eternal Being as the one and only direct agent in every detail of the universe, seems to Dr. Wallace absurd. "Long ages before the first rudiment of life appeared on the earth," he says, "long before all the suns we see had become suns, the infinite development had been at work and 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, and of so determining the material constitution of an 'earth' as to initiate and guide a course of development which would have resulted in a far higher being than man. Once assume a mind-developing power from all eternity, and it must, now and at all earlier periods of the past, have resulted in beings of infinite power—what we should term gods!"

Thus Dr. Wallace dismisses the ordinarily accepted conception of an Infinite and Omnipotent God, and puts in its place the idea of a divine hierarchy. He suggests that the vast chasm between ourselves and the Deity is occupied by a series of grades of beings, ranging from demi-gods and angels to almost unconscious "cell-souls." Subordinate creators, he argues, may have acted to produce the primordial ether. Using this as a vehicle, other spiritual agents may have accumulated suitable masses at suitable distances, which by gravitation, heat, electricity, and so on, would eventually become nebulae, suns, universes. For the beginnings of life, Dr. Wallace postulates "a body of what we may term organizing spirits who would be charged with the duty of so influencing the myriads of cell-souls as to carry out automatically *their* part of the work with accuracy and certainty." The crucial point would be the introduction of life even in its lowest form, thereafter to be subjected to all the processes of development necessary to carry it to its ultimate spirit form. Here Dr. Wallace injects his well-known views as to thought-transference. He intimates that higher intelligences may act on lower so as to cause transference of life; and life determines organizations. The best materials and conditions for development would thus be insured; the functions of life, such as cell-growth, the circulation of the blood, digestion, etc., would



SCIENTIST, SPIRITUALIST, SOCIALIST

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be conducted under the superintendence of exalted spiritual agents. The meaning of the whole process is summed up by Dr. Wallace in these words:

"Some such conception seems to me to be in harmony with the universal teaching of Nature—everywhere an almost infinite variety, not as a detailed design (as when it was supposed that God *made* every valley and mountain, every insect and every serpent), but as a foreseen result of the constitution of the universe. The vast whole is therefore a manifestation of His power—perhaps of His very self—but by the agency of His ministering angels through many descending grades of intelligence and power."

All this, it seems, has in view not merely man but spirit-man:

"It is when we look upon man as being here for the very purpose of developing diversity and individuality, to be further advanced in a future life, that we see more clearly the whole object of our earth-life as a preparation for it. In this world we have the maximum of diversity produced, with a potential capacity for individual educability . . . only limited by the time at the disposal of each of us. In the spirit-world death will not cut short the period of educational advancement. The best conditions and opportunities will be afforded for continuous progress to

a higher status, while all the diversities produced here will lead to an infinite variety, charm and use, that could probably have been brought about in no other way."

Dr. Wallace offers these hypotheses under the formal reserve that they may not be convincing to every one; but he thinks that at least what he has written will appeal to some of his 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."

The comment on Dr. Wallace's book is widespread and varied. Spiritualist journals, such as *Light* (London), naturally welcome its conclusions. The *Theosophical Century Path* (Point Loma, California) is also enthusiastic in its praise. "Surely," the last-named weekly declares, "this new book of

Professor Wallace's will mark a new era in scientific thought." It goes on to make the comment:

"The Professor is quite guarded in his suggestions as to Intelligences; but other people may not be so wise. What material is here for fantastic spiritist theories and 'psychic' delusion!

"The Professor seems to have made up his mind that the other intelligences are higher than man. There *are* intelligences higher than man; but there are also intelligences lower than man. The mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms—do they exhaust the list of kingdoms below the human? Why not extend the line downward below the mineral (or, if not downward, then beyond, perhaps on a reascending arc)? Why not fill the spaces between the known kingdoms? Why not postulate invisible kingdoms correlative with the visible kingdoms? The whole subject thus trenched upon is of course very profound and complex."

The *London Saturday Review* exclaims: "Here in fact is the Demiurgos of old: here appear anew 'thrones, dominations, principdoms, virtues, powers'; but where now is the great goddess Natural Selection?" The *London Nation* dismisses Dr. Wallace's conception as "a *contradictio in terminis*, or even worse."

The courage and conviction of the aged naturalist, the *New York Churchman* avers, are apparent even in his mystical speculations; but his vision of a pluralistic universe, it thinks, can hardly satisfy those who prefer the Christian ideal of an all-wise, all-controlling personality in nature. Similarly, a writer in *The British Weekly* declares:

"Many readers will no doubt wish that the veteran author of this valuable and profound volume could have given us as his final picture the vision of an All-wise, All-controlling Personality in nature, by whom 'were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible,' loving all that His hands have made, and guiding all whom He has redeemed to immortal life. That, surely, were a nobler representation of Mind in nature than the suggestion of elf-gods controlling the electrons of atoms, or liliputian deities presiding over the struggle for existence among the determinants or ultimate units of germplasm in the physiological cell."

Free-thinker and Christian apparently unite in this verdict. We find Mr. Joseph McCabe expressing in the *London Literary Guide* his fear that the new book "will add no more to the distinguished naturalist's reputation than did his earlier excursion into astronomy."



JOHN BURROUGHS AMONG HIS FRIENDS

A characteristic picture of the veteran naturalist and poet who has always preached a gospel for out-of-doors.