

A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE.*

Few have lived as long, or to such good purpose, as Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace. To most of us the Darwinian period, when the battle for evolution was fought and won, seems already to belong to a distant past. Yet Wallace and Hooker, evolutionists who stood fifty years ago second only to Darwin, are still living and active.

Many years ago Dr. Wallace published his "Darwinism," containing a summary of the theory of organic evolution, with a discussion of the principal facts bearing on the subject. This has appeared in several editions, and is still very widely read. The new work, "The World of Life," is not intended to take its place, but gives the author's most mature thoughts on life in general, its meaning and cause. Being thus a work of philosophy as well as science, it necessarily covers much debatable ground, but the author tells us that in every case his opinions result from a careful study of the facts, and whether correct or false, are at any rate not the fruits of mere inclination or fancy. The ground covered is so vast that no two really original writers, cultivating it during a lifetime, can be expected to garner the same harvest, nor is it desirable that they should do so. Hence almost every reader will find things that he himself would have put differently, if only because his temperament and experience differ from those of the author. Many, however, will object to Dr. Wallace's opinions simply because they are largely metaphysical, forgetting that the dogmatic negations of the materialistic are in their essence equally so.

On the emotional side, the book is chiefly notable for its expression of a great delight in every form of life, from man down; perhaps richer in quality than that shown by any other writer. I am inclined to think that Dr. Wallace is absolutely preëminent in this quality, because few naturalists have interested themselves in so many different aspects of life, while those who are not students of nature simply do not see many of its manifestations. The best of the nature-poets may doubtless have depths of feeling, as well as modes of expression, beyond the power of a biologist, but their writings sufficiently indicate the limitations of their field of vision. For the ordinary reader I believe this glow of pleasure in the contemplation of life of

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every kind is the most precious attribute of the book, because if it is communicated to him in any degree he will be enriched for the rest of his days. Even the statistical data concerning the number of species of plants in different areas have a charm for us when we realize with the author how much beauty and interest diversity implies, and how this leads to a still more wonderful diversity of animals dependent on the plants. As is indicated by the sub-title, Dr. Wallace regards life as manifesting a creative power, having the definite purpose of evolving spiritual beings capable of surviving death. He does not thereby abandon any part of the theory of evolution, as set forth in his earlier writings; but it is well known that in matters of this kind he differed from Darwin, who felt unable to formulate metaphysical theories, or at any rate to give them any pragmatic value. Logically, according to the ordinary doctrines of science, man is the outcome of what has gone before, and might conceivably have been predicted at any stage of the process by a being of sufficient reasoning power acquainted with all the facts. The process of evolution is such that at each stage things fit together, as it were, and appear as though made for each other. Man appears on the scene with conscious purpose, and is unable to imagine a universe without something of the kind. Is it altogether a quibble or play of words to put things this way? Let the lifeless universe exist for an x period, undergoing various physical and chemical changes until life appears, and with it consciousness. At this last moment *value* and *purpose* arise; until then they simply did not exist. We commonly hold that whatever *produces* value has thereby a value of its own, or in a sense purpose; hence as a matter of argument it may reasonably be maintained that life was the purpose of pre-existent lifeless being. This may be an "absurdly human" point of view; but being absurdly human, what are we to do? The contemplation of such a philosophic system necessarily arouses in us a sense of its incompleteness; and as though to fill a void, we are led to believe in some sort of conscious being or beings presiding over the destinies of the ostensibly azoic universe. We are in some such way started on the path. Dr. Wallace follows, and guided by him we may arrive at a theology more in harmony with science than those handed down to us by the churches. Even the doctrine of the multiplicity of creative agencies, put forth at the end of the book, may then seem to

have much in its favor, especially as contrasted with that of a single omnipotent, all-knowing, unchanging God.

Those who utterly refuse to consider questions of this kind will thrust all this aside as so much trash. For some, this limitation of the intellectual field may be a sort of necessity. There will, however, be many who with Darwin are keenly alive to the mystery of things, and freely acknowledge their personal need of light, while at the same time refusing consent to a series of "explanations" which they feel do not explain, and are not fortified by known facts. At this point a practical dilemma arises. If humanity is led to confine its thought entirely to limited fields, abandoning the celestial heights entirely to insincere litterati who play with great questions merely to tickle the passing fancy, will there be any loss? May we not answer, that the loss will be tremendous, incalculable? Yet this may come about from mere inertia, aided by fashion, our species "going to the dogs" in a veritable psychological fashion. On the other hand, history abundantly shows how heavy is the burden of a mass of theological or metaphysical dogma, supported by custom and tradition, but deadly to the free exercise of thought. It seems to me that we can only arrive at a sort of middle road, that of feeling keenly that things after all have a "meaning," that virtue is a reality, not an abstraction, that somehow the universe has a soul of its own; while at the same time guarding ourselves continually against those artificial thought-castles in which we are so liable to be imprisoned. Looking at the matter in this way, those of us who are not prepared to follow Dr. Wallace in all the intricacies of his personal faith, may nevertheless feel very strongly that he has done well in bringing forward his solution of the riddle of the ages, the result of more than fifty years of thought. The book contains many interesting and illuminating discussions of particular questions, and many expressions of opinion on debatable points, so that it will prove stimulating in a variety of ways. The reviewer is tempted to write at greater length than space permits. I have been interested to compare the American and English editions. Although they contain exactly the same material, the American book is considerably larger, with 441 pages against the 408 of the English. The English is on whiter paper, and the printing is blacker and more even. In the American edition figures 40 and 41 are upside down. T. D. A. COCKERELL.