

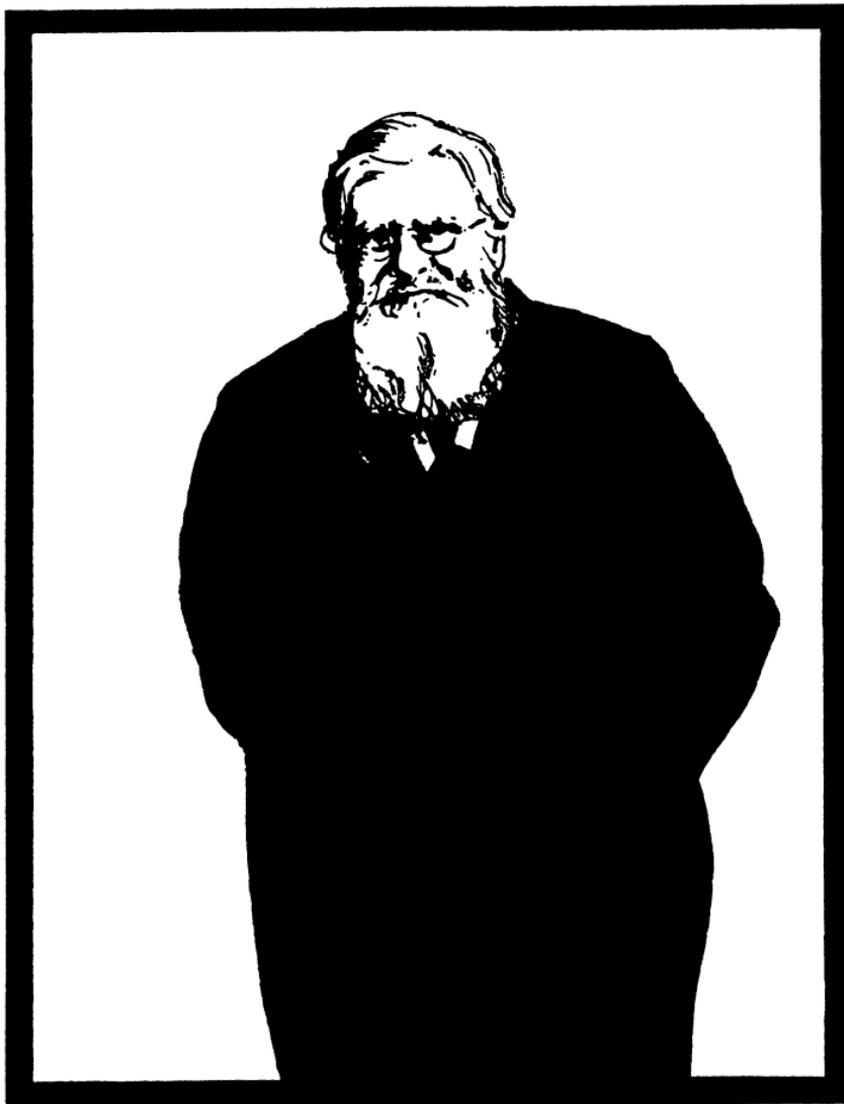
THE NEW VEDANTA

BY SCRUTATOR

IN the beginning the Word which was with God created the original matter of the celestial bodies and of the earth. So reads the higher interpretation of an ancient teaching. He of the Efficacious Word spake and the world was ; and from the day when the intelligence of man was set wondering upon the thousand glories of creation, upon the nature, origin and destiny of his own being, the problem of life, set in two words—Whence and Whither?—has exercised the highest intelligences of all ages. Those who have regarded life intelligently have ever sought to catch a glimpse of its meaning and purpose, feeling that without determinism, without some intelligent direction of effort towards preconceived ends, the strife and stress of life was so much threshing of the air. Philosophers without number have offered their interpretations of the great problem, and they who appeared the most positive in their conclusions offered the least ground for the trouble they had taken. I refer, of course, to those who enunciated the materialistic hypothesis which surely found its apotheosis in Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe*. Carbon is the common constituent of all material organisms, therefore, Carbon is Life. We are evolved from carbon, we go back to carbon and—it is a modification of carbon which asks this question concerning itself, Whence and Whither? I feel that the charcoal-burner has not come near to the answering of our question. One may as well ask the turn-cock, seeing that water is equally essential to the building up of organisms. Yet to regard man as an evolved carbohydrate does not account for the complex of man's consciousness, his hopes, fears, aspirations, and least of all for his self-sacrifice. Infinitely more acceptable to our mode of thinking is the later scientific teaching of Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, who, in his latest work entitled *The World of Life*,* proves the universe to be “ a manifestation of creative Power, directive Mind and ultimate Purpose.” He shows us how material evolution proceeded to a point where it produced organisms of a nature fitted to the purpose of a spiritual involution ; and how the human took possession of them. He gives to physical evolution a pur-

* London : Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1910.

pose and meaning and shows how an increasing sensibility in the organism rendered it increasingly responsive to the direction of the indwelling conscious entity. It is shown also that the consciousness of pain is in direct ratio to the needs of each stage in the scale of evolution. "In the lowest animals whose numbers



DR. A. R. WALLACE.

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are enormous, whose powers of increase are excessive, whose individual lives are measured by hours or days, and which exist to be devoured, pain would be almost or quite useless and would, therefore, not exist." . . . "No other animal *needs* the pain-sensations that we need; it is, therefore, absolutely certain that no other possesses such sensations in more than a fractional degree

of ours." Humans, on account of their natural nakedness, their prolonged helplessness and infancy, need pain as a guardian of life. The non-sensitive are the most careless of danger. The brute will die out before the human.

A most interesting phase of the discussion and one that arises directly out of the materialistic statement of the eternity of matter, is that which, in connection with this doctrine of Purpose and Utility, concerns the product of former universes and previous evolutions. If, as is held by Dr. Wallace, the purpose of creation and evolution is the development of individuality, and if, as is affirmed by other philosophers among both Idealists and Materialists, and supported by the observations of astronomers, the process of creation, of evolution and destruction, has been repeatedly enacted in the amplitudes of space, then there must exist orders of comparatively perfected Beings who, in relation to our own infant stage of development, may be to us as Gods. This conclusion, although advanced in this place as speculative, is, nevertheless, the faith of millions. It is the very essence of pure Hinduism and is, I venture to think, likely to appeal to the enlightened Theist of our later western development. The argument and conclusion arising from a careful survey of the great mass of scientific knowledge embodied in this work, are so convincingly and clearly stated by the learned author that I cannot do better than quote them directly. Dr. Wallace says:—

"In accordance with the views expounded in a former work, *Man's Place in the Universe*, I have fully discussed the evidences in plant and animal life indicating a prevision and definite preparation of the earth for Man—an old doctrine, supposed to be exploded, but which, to all who accept the view that the universe is not a chance product, will, I hope, no longer seem to be outside the realm of scientific inquiry.

"Still more important is the argument, set forth in some detail, showing the absolute necessity of a creative and directive power and mind as exemplified in the wonderful phenomena of growth, of organization, and fundamentally of cell-structure and of life itself. This view is strengthened by a consideration of the nature of the elements which alone render development possible."

That, in brief, is the argument, and the evidence for it lies in the nature of the elements which enter into the constitution of protoplasm, none of which, nor all of them combined, are endowed with either life or consciousness as we see them in the simplest organism. In the growth and development of the cell-structure we see from such inanimate beginnings the gradual building up of something which shows an orderly process of development.

“ But this orderly process is quite unintelligible without some *directive organizing* power constantly at work in or upon every chemical atom or physical molecule of the whole structure, as one after another they are brought to their places, and built in, as it were, to the structure of every tissue of every organ as it takes form and substance in the fabric of the living, moving, and, in the case of animals, sensitive creation.”

As to the nature of this “ directive organizing power,” Haeckel posits the “ cell-soul,” deriving it by some strange alchemy from the carbon compound, itself soulless. Dr. Wallace dares the logic of an old-fashioned school which sees intelligence behind purpose, faculty behind instrument, and utility in all things, and this, not because it is a concession to orthodox belief, but because it is the only position logically available to the dispassionate student of science. Similar considerations, with less of physical science to guide them, but a far more intimate knowledge of psychology than is yet attained in the West, led the Vedanta School of Philosophy to posit Life, Substance and Intelligence, with their psycho-physical expressions of Force, Matter and Consciousness, as the trinity of primordial co-ordinates; and to the postulate that we know nothing of matter apart from force and nothing of force apart from matter, it is always possible to reply that apart from consciousness we know nothing of either, a consideration which has led the Idealistic School to propound the thesis that things exist only in our consciousness. Without going so far as to accept without qualification the doctrine of Maya, in which everything is an illusion superposed upon the mind by the action of the Universal Will, it is yet possible to conceive that all orders of life are capable of being controlled and directed by the suggestion of orders successively superior to them, so that in sum, “ the vast whole is a manifestation of God’s power—perhaps of his very self—but by the agency of his ministering angels through many grades of intelligence and power,” as Dr. Wallace suggests; and this view is supported by human experience, by facts of science, and by considerations of utility.

This mediate action of the Deity is referred to by the author in his concluding remarks wherein he points the logical position to which a life-long study of the World of Life has led him.

“ To claim the Infinite and Eternal Being as the one and only direct agent in every detail of the universe seems, to me, absurd. If there is such an Infinite Being and if (as our existence should teach us) His will and purpose is the increase of conscious beings, then *we* can hardly be the first result of this purpose. We conclude, therefore, that there are now in the universe infinite grades of power, infinite grades of knowledge and wisdom, infinite grades of influence of higher beings upon lower. Hold-

ing this opinion, I have suggested that this vast and wonderful universe, with its almost infinite variety of forms, motions and reactions of part upon part, from suns and systems up to plant life, and the human living soul, has ever required and still requires the continuous co-ordinated agency of myriads of such intelligences."

Surely such a conclusion is more logical to the intelligent mind, and more conformable to the religious sense, than either that of the atheist (Rationalist though he styles himself), or that of the average Evangelical who affirms direct relations between embodied man and the Supreme Spirit. And in this connection I am tempted to cite one other and analogous conclusion arrived at by this great thinker. Speaking of Haeckel's teaching as the *dernier ressort* of those who have failed to accommodate their views of divine benevolence to the terribly exaggerated idea of the amount of suffering existing in the world—a belief that the universe had no creator or designer, but has always existed; and that the life pageant, with all its pain and horror, has been repeated cycle after cycle from eternity in the past, and will be repeated in similar cycles for ever—it is said:—

"We have here presented to us one of the strangest phenomena of the human mind—that numbers of intelligent men are more attracted to a belief which makes the amount of pain which they think does exist on the earth last for all eternity in successive worlds without any permanent and good result whatever, than by another belief, which admits the same amount of pain into one world only, and for a limited period, while whatever pain there is exists only for the grand purpose of developing a race of spiritual beings who may thereafter live without physical pain—also for all eternity! To put it shortly, they prefer the conception of an universe in which pain exists *perpetually* and *uselessly*, to one in which the pain is strictly *limited*, while its beneficial results are *eternal!*"

I do not think the position has ever been better put by any writer nor do I think that any of our great scientists have wrought more effectually and beneficially to interpret the facts of our physical existence into terms of our spiritual needs than has Dr. Wallace. His display of the World of Life in the light of science is fascinating beyond expression, while his teachings regarding the purpose of that world, although not actually embodying a new revelation, may certainly be regarded in the light of a new Gospel, and such, indeed, it will prove to many who have need of greater light and surer ground of hope.