

## Science.

## A Chain—or a Spur?

It would be but superficial to regard Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace's remarkable article in the "Fortnightly Review" as a mere matter of idiosyncrasy. But colour is lent to this view by the ease with which his statements may be refuted. In brief, his conclusion is this: The earth is the actual centre of the universe, and the position of man upon it is special and probably unique. The supreme end and purpose of this vast universe was the production and development of the living soul in the perishable body of man.

This paper is certainly the logical outcome of the curious course of Dr. Wallace's mind during several past decades. Worthless in itself, it is yet to me of the gravest significance as a study in mind—in mind using wrong methods. Long ago Dr. Wallace independently conceived the theory of organic evolution. He fought well for it when people cared and fighting was needed. So much work, indubitably, has Dr. Wallace done for the world. The good remains. His name will be remembered in its relation to the supreme discovery of the ages, the discovery of which the publication of the "Origin of Species" in 1859 may be taken as the landmark. The generalisation of evolution is the lasting legacy of that century to its successors. But the deductions from that fact are entirely another matter. A materialism astoundingly crude was the expression of the swing of the pendulum in the 'sixties. It is rampant, of course, to-day, though in a very different form.

In a recently published letter Ruskin expressed his opinions upon Lord Avebury's list of the "hundred best books." Amongst those through which he dashed an angry pen, as objectionable and dangerous, was Darwin's thunderbolt above referred to. And how wise were his reasons. The book seemed to him dangerous, because it attracted a crowd of idle, curious people concerned with the secondary question of their history and descent, whilst forgetful of their proper realm of thought, the primary question of their immediate personal business here and now. To all such, Darwin, in Ruskin's delightful words, was "like a dim comet wagging its tail of phosphorescent nothing across the steadfast stars." The comment was only too just. The deduction from evolution was, that if man be brother to the worm, he is practically but a worm; that if his ancestor be Simian and gibbering—the "dead-sea ape" of Carlyle—to the body of this death he is for ever chained. Dr. Wallace's attempt to reinstate the Ptolemaic Cosmogony, and to prove that man is the very centre and apex of all things, is the reaction from this hopeless view. Both methods of reasoning are faulty. But, of the two, the later is infinitely preferable, infinitely nearer to the truth. Wisdom is justified of her children. Dr. Wallace's wisdom is in the conviction—innate, intuitive, call it what you will—the truth of which he has sought by a method as futile as superfluous to prove.

For my Simian ancestry perturbs me no whit. I cannot for the life of me see why the means of my production should affect the validity of *me*. The evolutionist, with whom Dr. Wallace was himself so long identified, and from whom he has now so completely sundered himself, has lost the glory of to-day and the promise of the future in the unmasking of his past. If evolution be purely a matter of retrospect, Ruskin's expurgation is justified, and Dr. Wallace's wild article is a splendid, if desperate protest.

If a given sun or planet were proved to be the centre of the universe, that physical relation, great indeed to think upon, would be nothing worth beside the smallest of the unselfish acts or noble thoughts of man. That is to say,

if the dwellers on that supposed centre were merely beasts or blackguards, then Mother Earth and her brood would take precedence of them by right divine. Therefore the mere question of position in space, upon which Dr. Wallace has argued at such length, is beside the point. But, to his mind, it is part of the argument. Man's value to the universe, he thinks, depends in some measure upon the position of the globe which he inhabits. Now this is an indication of the folly of Dr. Wallace's method. He seems to me to be trying to prove the great instant fact of the present by reference to the past. For, despite himself, he is an evolutionist at bottom; and, among scientists, that is to be, with rare exceptions, like Lot's wife. She, as they of themselves, knew whence she had come. She, like them, must vainly look backwards. They, like her, are therefore become pillars of salt.

And this is where I follow Stevenson and Tennyson and Drummond. There is no need for splendid revolt against evolution, no need for wild theorizing. It is correct, I am told, to decry Tennyson's later work. Mr. Andrew Lang, in his lifelet of the seer, makes no mention of one or two poems which, for their relation to the great thoughts of a momentous epoch, are certain of immortality. Now I adore the melody of the *Juvenilia*. "Where Claribel low-lieth" is a line that ever delights me. But, among his unread work, Tennyson gave us a line that has another value: "As he stands on the heights of his life with a glimpse of a height that is higher." Now it is a matter of interest only remote and speculative to me how much headway they have made in Mars. I have one or two friends with whom I would dare challenge the best of any race on any planet, central or circumferential, in the Universe. They establish our "Place in Nature" finally enough for me. I do not need Dr. Wallace to argue from the depth of the Atlantic or the nature of atmospheric dust that man is a little lower than the angels. A few among our fellows make that patent enough—thank God—to most of us.

The monkey is to man the pledge for posterity. When I know what he implies, I cease to consider him further. Ourselves and our children are far more interesting. Ages yet unborn will recall the nineteenth—as Dr. Wallace has called it, the "wonderful"—century for its establishment of the supreme theory of evolution. They will forget the deductions of that century. It had made such an astounding induction that its power of reasoning forwards was in abeyance. I would have the men of the twentieth century to be remembered as well, and perhaps even more gratefully, by posterity. How we should respect the monkey if we knew that he had guessed the truth and had planned and plotted to make the most of his latent possibilities—that *we* might be! So, in a distant æon, ere the sun has grown too cold, may the transfigured men who wear our form, but who have achieved all that our noblest have but dared to dream—may they look back on us and say, "The men of the nineteenth century found the Truth, but the men of the twentieth looked 'before and after,' and pined and strove for what indeed was not, but, by the promise of that Truth, assuredly was to be."

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