

**THE ORIGIN OF
LIFE: A REPLY TO
SIR OLIVER LODGE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9781760573195

The origin of life: a reply to Sir Oliver Lodge by Joseph McCabe

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

JOSEPH MCCABE

**THE ORIGIN OF
LIFE: A REPLY TO
SIR OLIVER LODGE**

THE ORIGIN OF LIFE

A REPLY TO SIR OLIVER LODGE

BY

JOSEPH McCABE

(Author of "Haeckel's Critics Answered," etc.)

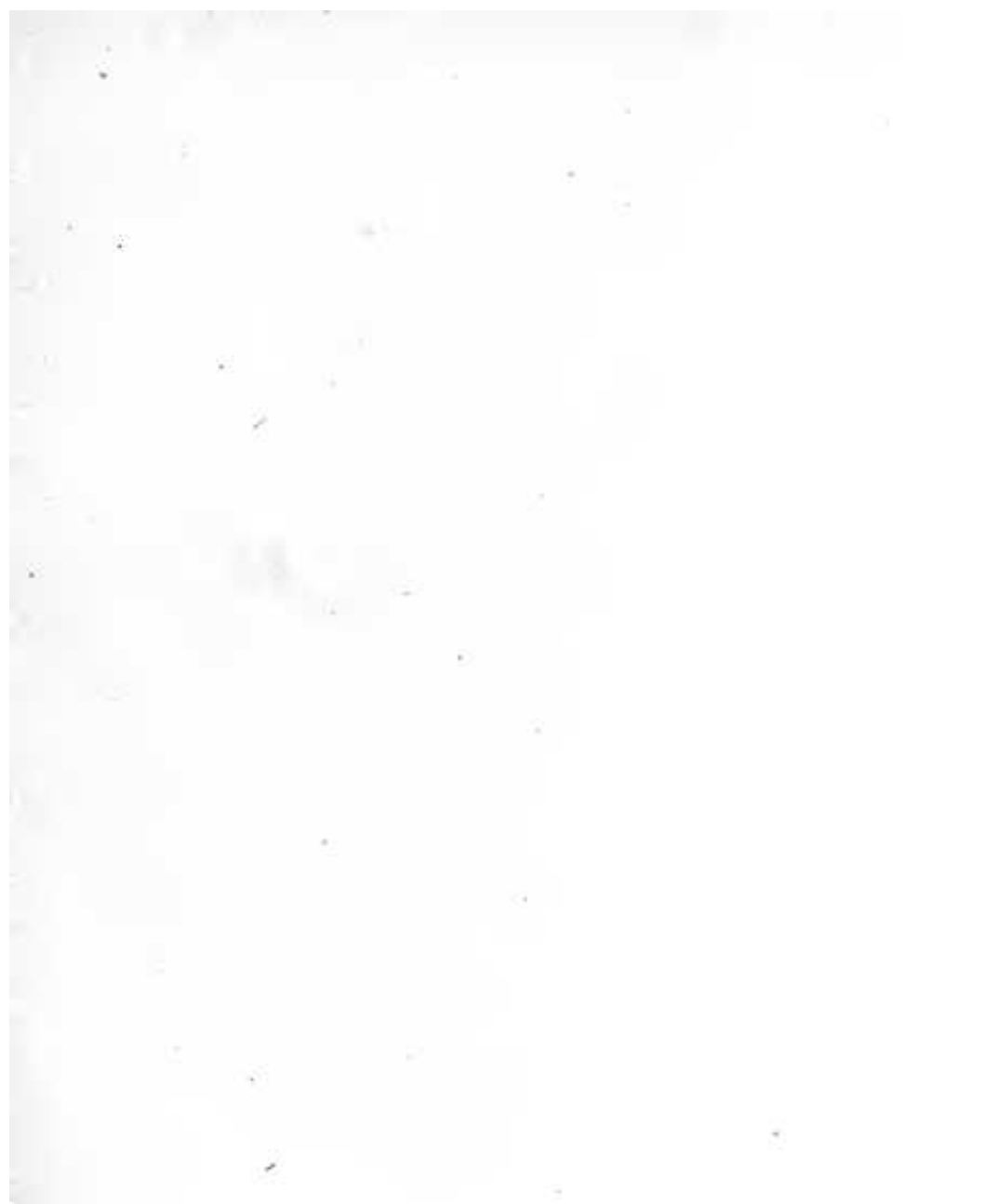
[ISSUED FOR THE RATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION, LIMITED]

WATTS & CO.,
17, JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

1906

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	7
CHAPTER I.	
THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM - - - -	13
CHAPTER II.	
THE SIMPLEST FORMS OF LIFE - - - -	29
CHAPTER III.	
THE NATURE OF MATTER - - - -	43
CHAPTER IV.	
IN THE BEGINNING	59
CHAPTER V.	
THE EVOLUTION OF LIFE AND MIND - - - -	74



PREFACE

A LITTLE work that has been recently issued by Sir Oliver Lodge, one of the most gifted physicists in this country, affords an instructive commentary on the opinion that the conflict between science and theology is over. The thoughtful reader cannot but see that such an opinion is a very superficial estimate of the relation of these two great branches of thought. That theologians contrive to persuade themselves of so desirable a consummation is not a matter of surprise; nor can we wonder that even Agnostic men of science, eager to save their valuable special research from the hampering complication of this conflict, frequently express, though on very different grounds, a somewhat similar opinion.

The discerning observer who stands outside both camps cannot fail to see that the truce is a hollow one. If the fundamental doctrines of theology are to be held in any other than a figurative sense, they demand for their base a spiritual universe that is not an evolution or an outcome of visible nature. If the principle of life and thought in man can be conceived as an especially elaborate synthesis of the

energies or movements associated with the basic forms of matter, the belief in its immortality, already attenuated into a wistful hope, thins away into nothingness. Since the expert of either physical or biological science has, as such, no concern with the nature of the human mind, there is some apparent reason in his petulant insistence that he cannot come into conflict with any rational scheme of theology. But the ground is *only* apparent. And the attempt of Sir Oliver Lodge to spiritualise the principle of life, an attempt that has brought him into sharp conflict with our biologists, puts the situation in an admirably clear light.

For some such demonstration as that essayed by Sir Oliver Lodge is absolutely necessary if the distinct spiritual world, on which theology builds in its teaching as regards man, is to be maintained. It was thought by the late Professor Mivart and by Dr. A. Russel Wallace that a stand might be made against what is called "Materialism" at the frontier of human history. The "whole cosmological domain" might be yielded to the exactions of Tyndall, provided we could mark off the human soul as something essentially distinct from it and not involved in its ceaseless dissolutions. Unfortunately for this position, the light that has now been thrown on prehistoric man entirely prevents us from accepting it. We shall see presently that the

evidence for the evolution of man's soul from that of a lower animal is as cogent as that for the evolution of his body. The mind of man differs only in degree from the mind of the lower animal: it is the same vital principle in a higher phase of development. The spiritualist is, therefore, compelled to claim that *all* life is immaterial in its nature. The vital principle that first unfolds its powers in the tiniest and simplest living things, and advances by a continuous evolution up to its most splendid manifestation in the brain of man, is distinct at the very root from the familiar agencies in nature. It belongs to a different world of being, and merely manifests itself *through* material frames, for some inscrutable reason, when the proper conditions are given. It is a kind of spiritual reservoir, existing apart from the cosmic fund of material energies. Little bits detach themselves from the "big lump" (in Sir Oliver Lodge's words) and animate material bodies. When the frames decay they go back into the immaterial world.

This is the theory now advanced by Sir Oliver Lodge as a basis on which theology may be rationally reconstructed. The fact that his large scientific attainments lie entirely outside the domain of biology (the science of life), and that his views have met with a very hostile reception on the part of the biologists of this country, must indeed induce us to examine his theory in the critical mood in which, for instance,

we scrutinise Professor Haeckel's excursions into ecclesiastical history, but should influence us no further. The speculations of a trained thinker and widely informed student are always entitled to respect. I propose, therefore, in the following essay to give in readable form the actual condition of our knowledge of the origin and nature of life, and to see how far Sir Oliver Lodge's theory is consistent with it.

The task is rendered somewhat difficult from a variety of reasons that the reader will appreciate as we proceed. The theory is put forward in language which is neither clear nor consistent. It is throughout stated as the alternative to a "Materialistic" conception of life which exists mainly in Sir Oliver Lodge's imagination and a few dusty and forgotten controversial works. It is contrasted all through Sir Oliver's work, *Life and Matter*, with the theory of Professor Haeckel; but this is quite erroneously stated and most unfairly misrepresented. When, in addition, the reader finds Haeckel's system assailed with a shower of such painfully familiar missiles as "miserable and degraded Monism," "extravagant pretensions," "free-and-easy dogmatism," "rather fly-blown production," "jubilant but uninstructed and comparatively ignorant amateur materialist," and when he remembers that these come from the Principal of an English University and one of the most religious thinkers of our time, he feels a sort of compulsion to accept what is set