

# **WONDERS OF ORGANIC LIFE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649275908

Wonders of organic life by Anonymous

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**ANONYMOUS**

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ORGANIC LIFE**



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LONDON:  
THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY;

*Instituted 1709.*

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# WONDERS OF ORGANIC LIFE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE VITAL PRINCIPLE—THE BLOOD.

IN the consideration of organic beings, we must ever keep before us the great fact, that life is as much life in the monad or animalcule, as in the whale, the elephant, or the rhinoceros—that mass does not add intensity to vitality—that duration of existence is but an infinitesimal portion of time, whether it be counted by minutes or days, or measured by the revolutions of centuries. The elephant, and the ephemera; the banian tree of three thousand years, the sturdy oak, or churchyard yew, and the tender little annual that blooms and withers away, exist all and each according to prefixed laws; and when their extinction takes place, the time is as if it had never been. Startle not; for, O man! thou in the midst of creation standest alone, the sole mighty exception. To thee time will not be as if it had



never been ; it is with thee the precursor of a momentous eternity.

It has been often said, wherever *life* can be there life is. The minutest drop of water is to some beings an ample sea ; everywhere around us, on the land, in the water, in the air, the results of the creative fiat are made manifest ; and the number and diversity of organic beings overwhelm us with astonishment. The huge whales of the ocean present us with the largest of animal forms, and the giant trees of the inter-tropics with the most stupendous of vegetable productions ; but, on the other hand, it has not been determined at what degree of minuteness a boundary is put to organization. The most powerful microscopes are limited in their sphere, yet they have opened to us domains of organic life, the existence of which without their aid would never have been suspected. By the term life, as we here use the word, we mean organized beings in contradistinction to inorganized matter, even in a state of crystallization.

It may, however, be asked in the outset, What do we understand by *life* in the abstract, that is, irrespective of organization ? We shall answer the question as best we can—craving our reader's indulgence, if, in the explanation of subjects of an abstract nature, we are occasionally necessitated to employ language of a scientific character.

*Life*, it must be admitted, prosecute our researches into it as we may, is a deep mystery. Setting *man* aside, we know not what *any*

animal loses when it dies, nor what it had before it died; therefore we know not what death is, further than is made manifest to the senses of the living, and that is, a resolution of the frame into the elements around us—dust unto dust. But *something* once kept this dust together—gave it feelings, passions, and desires—rendered the assumption of nutritive particles imperative, and made reproduction a law—such was the *fiat* of creation. What, then, is this *something*?—this that makes the infant grow to manhood, the acorn rise into the oak—this that permits man to wither as the flower, and the oak to moulder into ruin. What, we repeat, is *life*?—or, if the reader like the term better—What is the vital principle? It is obviously either something or nothing; if something, it must be superadded to organization; if nothing, it must be a *consequence* of organization, and a mere aspect of matter under certain conditions or arrangements. But inert matter cannot vitalize itself, nor can any other than vitalized bodies produce or generate vitalized bodies. From vital organization alone, is vital organization transmitted. Turning for a solution of the difficulties which invest the subject to an examination of the phenomena of death, mystery is still found enshrouding it.

The precise mode in which an animal dies we cannot tell; to say that it has ceased to breathe and to feel, is to say nothing—for these things are merely the consequences of death. We may kill by blood-shedding, or by strangu-

lation, or by the infliction of agony ; but even then, the question reverts—What has quitted the body, leaving it a prey to the operative influence of the laws of chemical dissolution? The whole subject, we are forced again to confess, is shrouded in mystery. This we know, that vitality and organization (a convenient term, if understood in its true sense) are ever associated—that when vitality becomes extinct, organization retains an aspect only, waiting for the laws of chemistry to do their office—and that living beings only can produce living successors. One thing is certain, that between living bodies and the laws of chemical affinity there is, as far as vitality is concerned, a great antagonism, for organic resolution without commensurate reparation is the consequence only of death. Nevertheless, at the same time that we urge this grand principle, we acknowledge that chemical actions are perpetually in operation in all living bodies, but under the mystic laws of the vital energy. It must be at once apparent, then, that chemical operations or changes, however intricate, however precise, displayed by organic bodies, cannot be the original cause of *vitality*, nor yet be, in and of themselves, the vital principle. The same observation applies to that recondite agent which we term electricity, galvanic action, or electro-magnetism. No action in the organic living frame takes place without involving galvanic or electric changes. The nervous system is a wonderful galvanic apparatus, but *life* is