

THE LIFE ON OTHER WORLDS

BY WILLIAM ALPHONSO MURRILL

IF there are other worlds like ours, with living beings, what forms of life might be expected to occur upon them? Since the different parts of our stellar system are fundamentally alike, the same general types of organic life would probably exist on the different worlds, with almost infinite variety of detail according to varied conditions.

Plants would doubtless be present to furnish food for animals and purify the air; and animal life would be represented by lower and higher forms as on the earth; but the highest types of animal life on the different worlds might be very different and not at all resemble men. A world where there was no land above water, for example, could never produce a very high type; nor could one whose climate remained continually warm and moist. An easy life never develops much of a brain.

If Mars were inhabited, the highest types there would presumably approach more nearly those of our earth because influenced by the same sun; but we can not now conclude, as we did under the old Nebular Hypothesis, that Mars is so much older than the earth that its "men" have all arrived by this time at the stage of "supermen." Being only one seventh the size of the earth and much farther from the sun, it may have cooled down more quickly and allowed life to begin sooner; but the process may have been too rapid to permit the development of a high type of intelligence, which as a rule required a considerable period.

Camille Flammarion, the great French astronomer, wrote a very charming imaginative book in which he described the winged creatures supposed to inhabit Mars, absorbing food from the atmosphere like plants, communicating with one another by thought transfer-

ence, and leading in general an angelic life. Ferrier, who came later, declared that Mars was inhabited, and that the people there were like us; that they could not have wings because hands were so necessary in obtaining knowledge and obeying the dictates of the mind.

The nights on Mars are lighted only by the stars, because the two moons are too small to give any appreciable light. For the same reason, there could be no tides. Owing to the small size of the planet, gravitation would be much less than with us and animals correspondingly more agile and graceful. Life in the air would present more variety than life in the ocean, because of more extreme conditions.

When we cease to confine our attention to our own planetary system and let our minds wander out into space, where other suns with different kinds of light are in control, we must of necessity make allowances for the varying conditions. If the imagination is given free rein, all sorts of creatures may be conjured up, some very inferior to ourselves and others greatly superior. In case my readers will agree not to take me too literally, I will indicate briefly how this might be done.

Suppose, for example, that the natural conditions on other worlds were more favorable to certain animals than to man, enabling them to outstrip him in the upward climb. Then there might be lion-men on one planet, pig-men on another, centaurs on another, elephant-men on another, dog-men on another, and mermen and mermaids on still another, with their essential characteristics worked out in this highly developed state.

The pig-men would naturally devote their intellects to the development of an abundance of highly nutritious and palatable food, while the lion-men would eat meat only and become very fierce. In the case of the mermen, the planet would be practically covered with water, having only a few rocks where they could bask in the sun, and hands would not be as necessary as fins. In the case of the elephants, the immense body would have to be supported on at least four legs, but the trunk could take the place of the hand as it does with the elephant of our acquaintance. Of course, the architecture and the scale of everything developed by such a large creature would be immense.

Then, again, the inhabitants of a given planet might live for

centuries, like some of our trees, attaining remarkable knowledge and skill, and working out mysteries that we should be only too glad to solve. They might understand alchemy; be able to rear children in incubators without the pain and inconvenience of birth; know how to produce large men or small ones by the use of glandular secretions, as we breed horses of different sizes for different kinds of work; control sex and genius; and keep their girls always young by feeding them upon certain foods. Even the synthetic production of people might be conceivably attained and the character of the product absolutely controlled.

Arcvad, an imaginary inhabitant of Mars, was supposed to have constructed a telescope two thousand feet long with a lens five hundred feet in diameter, through which he observed the inhabitants of the earth and became so displeased with their actions that he decided to petrify them with a terrible force. On his planet it was customary to kill off the weak, as in ancient times, and mercy was unknown to him. I prefer to think rather of some favored spot, somewhere in space, where knowledge is so perfect that men have no fear of the natural forces, and their religion is unmingled with superstition and dread of the unknown—a religion of love and mercy, requiring neither burnt offerings nor punishment by fire. Such a place, I think, would be very near Heaven.

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