Transcription (from *Trove*), July 2014:

The Register (Adelaide, Australia) 71(18455) (6 Jan. 1906): 7c-7d (anon.).

[p. 7c]

‘A Rival of Darwin.’

“My Life: A Record of Events and Opinions,” by Alfred Russel Wallace (two vols.); George Bell &, Sons London.—Probably sheer luck has a good deal to do with the apportionment of what men call fame. Wallace was intimate with Darwin, Huxley, and Herbert Spencer, who admitted him as standing on the same level as themselves; but it would be idle to pretend that his name means anything like as much as theirs to the popular ear. Paul’s “Modern England” calls him “a scientific theorist only less eminent than Darwin, and an independent co-operator in discovering the origin of species.” Dublin University, when giving him an honorary degree in 1882, declared in sonorous Latin—“Darwin indeed was the first to pluck the golden laurel branch. Yet through this did Wallace suffer no eclipse; for, as Virgil sang, ‘One branch removed, another was to hand; another, bright and golden as the first.” Wallace had no special advantage in early life. His opportunities were all of his own making. He was born in 1823 and is still living. Leaving school before he was 14, he was engaged with an elder brother in surveying in a small way, which became larger as the “railway mania” set in.

> In 1846, this year of wild speculation, it is said that plans and sections for 1,263 new railways were duly deposited, having a proposed capital of £563,000,000, and the sum required to be deposited at the Board of Trade was so much larger than the total amount of gold in the Bank of England, and notes in circulation at the time, that the public got frightened, a panic ensued, shares in the new lines, which had been at a high premium, fell almost to nothing, and even the established lines were greatly depreciated. Many of the lines were proposed merely for speculation, or to be bought off by opposing lines which had a better chance of success. Not one-tenth of the lines proposed that year were ever made, and the money wasted upon surveyors, engineers, and law expenses, must have amounted to millions.

The Great Discovery.

In 1848 Wallace had reached his real mission in life, and went out to South America collecting birds and insects on the Amazon, supporting himself by the sale of specimens he sent home. When he returned to London he published two books, and became friendly with all the scientific men of the day. Soon he was off again to Singapore and the neighbouring islands, bird-hunting. Very interesting is his theory that the light colouring of Australian parrots and pigeons is due to the absence of monkeys, squirrels, and other enemies or competitors for tree food, thus depriving them of all necessity for deceptive or “protective” colouring, and allowing them free scope for development on any lines. And thus he worked along to those independent theories on the origin of species, which form the chief point of interest in his career. From Singapore[1] he sent to the Magazine of Natural History (September, 1855) a paper “On the law which regulated the introduction of new species,” evolution being clearly pointed to in the closing sentence of summary:— “Every species has come into existence coincident both in space and time with a pre-existing closely allied species.” In 1858 he wrote a letter which proves that his theorizing was independent. “I have been much gratified by a letter from Darwin in which he says that he agrees with almost every word of my paper. He is now preparing his great work on “Species and Varieties.” He may save me the trouble of writing more on my hypothesis, by proving that there is no difference in nature

between the origin of species and of varieties; or he may give me trouble by arriving at another conclusion; but, at all events, his facts will be given for me to work upon." Two months later the solution of the whole great problem flashed upon him, and it is matter of history that he at once dispatched it to Darwin, whose great book, embodying the same idea, was then nearly ready for the press.[2]

Later Life.

The latter part of Wallace's long life has been successful and happy, brightened as it has been by a modest civil service pension of £200. He has known everybody, in both England and the United States. He has developed numerous fads— Socialism, Agnosticism, land nationalization, spiritualism, anti-vaccination. He has written a really valuable book on "Island Life," and at least one volume on Australia, arguing incidentally that our aborigine is really a primitive type of the Caucasian, and by no means so low in intellect as has usually been believed. He gives a most amusing account of his wager with John Hampden, the celebrated "crank," who maintained so stoutly about 1870 that the earth was flat. Wallace accepted a challenge, proved convexity to the satisfaction of the referees and pocketed £500, staked to abide the result. For 15 years he was pursued into private life by the pertinacious Hampden, with placards, postcards, and circulars of "cheat, swindler, and impostor," "lying, infernal thief," "he shall never die in his bed." Several times Wallace had him imprisoned; on the other hand, Hampden recovered the £500 by action at law! The book is excellent in printing, illustration, and binding. It is, however, far too long. The weakness of all autobiographies is that some matter quite uninteresting to the reader will be inserted because it interests the writer. That weakness is here carried to an extreme degree. The food at school, with the flavour of particular dishes, a casual walk or picnic, epitaphs collected by the writer's father, doggerel verses sent him by young friends, a long paper of his own on Welsh farming (which a magazine would not accept)—all these things pad out the first volume. Wallace once went on board a brig about to start for Singapore. He gives careful descriptions of the personality and character of all the officers. At the last moment, the vessel's sailing orders were changed, and he had to leave it for another. This trifling matter fills more than two large and solid pages; at similar length is described his engagement in 1862 to a young lady who jilted him, and whom he has never heard of since. A discreet editor would have reduced the size of this first volume by fully one-half. In 1867 the British Museum, owing Wallace £5, remitted it by P.O. order, including the cost of the order in the amount, so that he lost sixpence. It seems hardly credible, but (making no complaint at the time) he has preserved the official memoranda, and now prints them in full to show "this preposterous and utterly dishonest method of paying part of an admitted debt." On the other hand, he must be thanked for giving to the world some quaint and quite new examination "howlers."

> The habit (habitat) of the horse is plowing, and the elephant goes to shows.
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> The principal habitat of the elephant is the fauna, the rhinoceros, the buffalo, and the hippopotamus is the white bear.
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> Icebergs are formed by geysers shooting up in the air out of the sea and frozen there.
>
> Extinct animals means that they have gone away; but may become active again! Some of the causes that they have become extinct since the appearance of man are, that they have been caged up, &c. The animals that have become extinct since the appearance of man are the jaguars.
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> The material found by deep dredging in the Atlantic is—the Atlantic canal or cable.
>
> When it is winter in Europe it is summer in Australia. Now, Australia being a very small part of the earth, it will not require as much heat as the other continents did. Consequently more heat can be given by the sun to the polar regions than in our summer.

[1] [Editor's note: Actually, this was sent from Sarawak.]

[2] [Editor's note: This is not correct: it was nowhere near ready for the press.]

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