

Transcription (from hardcopy), July 2014:

*The Daily Citizen* (London & Manchester) No. 340 (8 Nov. 1913): 1d, 2d (anon.).

[p. 1]

‘Alfred Russel Wallace. Death at 90 Years of Age. Last of the Great Victorians.’

Full of years and of honours, Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, O.M., died yesterday at his home in Wimborne County.

He was one of the greatest and clearest thinkers of his age. To the last he kept his love of and faith in humanity.

Born at Usk, in Monmouthshire, in 1823, Dr. Wallace very early became a Socialist. When first his eyes were opened to the need for social readjustment he was but a stripling working for his living in the employ of a Tottenham Court-road builder. Near by the workshop stood an old hall of science where Robert Owen was wont to deliver his lectures. It happened that one day the apprentice Wallace entered the hall and received his message.

Clear-visioned and powerful of intellect, he at once turned his attention to the sufferings, social and physical, of his fellows. He made up his mind to inquire fully into the conditions of life in this country as they were between 70 and 80 years ago and how it was possible to better them. His passionate love of knowledge brought him in contact with many great men of science, notably H.W. Bates, the famous entomologist, who persuaded him to carry out his inquiries along strictly scientific lines.

“Let me get to the bottom of this,” was one of Dr. Wallace’s most frequent utterances. Thus it was that after having read several numbers of Darwin’s *Journal* he set sail with Bates to the Amazon, there to make researches of great scientific importance. From 1848 to 1852 the two young investigators were in the tropics, writing books on their travels and forming valuable entomological collections. This first scientific expedition gave him that zest for travel which afterwards led to a six years’ scientific exploration in the Malay Archipelago, made doubly notable by the collections of specimens now to be seen in the British and the Oxford Museums, and by the fact that it was during this period that he initiated the theory of natural selection. The idea of the survival of the fittest came to him in a remarkable fashion. While he was suffering from a severe attack of fever he pondered deeply on several works that he had just read, among them Malthus’s essay on population.

#### STORY OF A GREAT DISCOVERY.

As he afterwards remarked: “The whole idea of the survival of the fittest flashed upon me in a moment.” After much thought he communicated with Darwin; who, curiously enough, was at the same time concentrating upon the identical idea. The result of their independent work was the reading of some striking essays before the Linnaean Society.

An interesting sequel to this came 50 years later, when, referring to the oft-repeated statements that natural selection was a simultaneous discovery by Darwin and himself, Dr. Wallace said:—

As a matter of fact the idea occurred to Darwin 20 years before it came to me. Darwin had been urged to publish his theory lest some other person thought of it. He always refused, however, saying that he had not got all his material together. Then at last the prediction was fulfilled, and the idea occurred to me, and it came upon Darwin like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. This forced a premature publication, and it was arranged to have the papers read before that society. Had Darwin published a few years sooner I should have had no part in the discovery of natural selection. I think the idea had come to us principally by reason of the fact that we were both ardent beetle-hunters.

#### CHAMPION OF THE OPPRESSED.

In his later years Dr. Wallace turned from natural to social science, and brought to bear on its problems the same glowing mind, penetrating vision, and untrammelled love of truth. His work on Land Nationalisation, published in 1882, gave one of the earliest impulses to that examination of the basis of our social system which has disclosed alike its makeshift economics, its lopsided politics, and the many evils which result from crushing multitudes under the weight of the social structure. While adopting towards them an attitude of vengeance, as a man of science Dr. Wallace realised that the evils of society, the bitter fruit of ignorance and prejudice, are alike wilful and curable. From that sprang his ardent championship of the oppressed.

When the Order of Merit was instituted for men of outstanding eminence for whom ordinary titles are tawdry vanities, he was rightly included in the roll. But his title to world-wide fame needed no official recognition.

#### DR. WALLACE AND "THE DAILY CITIZEN."

So Alfred Russel Wallace has passed on (writes a special representative of *The Daily Citizen* who interviewed the veteran scientist a few months ago). I dare say I was not far from being the last to whom he spoke at any length on public affairs. Some of last night's papers refer to him as the greatest of scientists and the most wonderful of old men—to me he will always be the most wonderful young man I ever met—and so far as concerns what are called years, he was approaching 90. I sat in his roomy library and listened and took an occasional note of his generous message to *The Daily Citizen*, while his eyes flashed and he poured forth a stream of comment, not so much censuring the employing and propertied classes as expostulating with them for not being able to see the wastefulness of our present economic system. He had the clearest possible vision of the social and political situation, even though he only saw it from his pleasant home in breezy Broadstone—part of one of the few counties that have more than one holder of the really illustrious Order of Merit among their residents. He could not understand why the Liberals did not get to the root of the matter in social reform, and in particular was at pains to show that the small-holdings legislation was quite futile so long as the administration was left to the county councils.

He realised just how the Labour Party is cribbed and confined by the iron social observances of a deeply conservative nation, and he urged that the party should use every occasion for advertising its work and aims precisely.

#### HIS OWN WORK AND AIMS.

Like Dr. Frank in yesterday's *Daily Citizen*, he saw no way of relief save the Parliamentary way; but he looked forward to the advent one day—he did not pretend it was close—of a co-operative commonwealth based upon Bellamy's "Looking Backward" and "Equality," which he declared were the best descriptions extant of a workable Socialism.

Dr. Wallace's exact position as scientist and social reformer I do not dogmatise upon; but of one thing I am certain, and that is that never has anybody come more fully within my favourite description of a great man, namely, that "he is a combination of the head of a man and the heart of a boy." Dr. Wallace's work was great, but beautiful, as well as great, as his unswerving and immeasurable faith in and love for his fellow men.

#### PERSONAL TRAITS.

Mr. C. W. Child, who studied the character of Dr. Wallace, as revealed by the lines of his hand, says these disclosed extraordinary tenacity, a sensitive and retiring nature, a wholehearted contempt for "side" and make-

[p. 2]

believe, shrewd observation, unfailing optimism, sobriety, tireless industry, intrepid bravery, joined to a lovable and delightful nature, and enormous and versatile intellectuality—in short an unparalleled combination of science with imagination.

The following birthday greeting sent to *The Daily Citizen* on October 8 last was the last public message from Dr. Wallace that ever appeared in print:—

"Most heartily do I congratulate *The Daily Citizen* upon its first birthday. I have read the paper from the commencement. I feel that its clear, outspoken policy and fearless enunciation of principles are to be commended. I think you are doing wonderfully well, better than I expected, realising what it must mean to run a daily newspaper. Such a paper as *The Daily Citizen* was greatly wanted, and you must be doing an enormous amount of good. I hope the circulation will increase, and that the workers will realise the value to them of such a paper. Much is yet to be accomplished, and it is for *The Daily Citizen* to hammer away for improvement in the conditions of living and other things.

"Experts declare that the great bulk of the workers are receiving less than a decent living wage, and *The Daily Citizen* should continually insist upon every worker having a continual increase until his wage is really a living one. Any idea of decrease should be most strenuously opposed. We now want to see the fruits of the Parliament Bill realised, but to have a General Election now will be utter madness. I trust *The Daily Citizen* will press upon the Government the importance of the proposed land legislation being thorough and going to the root of the matter."

[\[Return\]](#)

*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2014.