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[p. 1]

“Grand Old Man” of Science. Death of Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace.’

The “Pall Mall Gazette” announces, with much regret, that Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, the famous scientist and writer, died at his house, “Old Orchard,” Broadstone, Wimborne, Dorsetshire, this morning.

Dr. Wallace was in his ninety-first year.

With his friend, Sir Joseph Hooker, the late Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace has long shared the title of our English “Grand Old Men” of Science, and his death restores him to the great group who made the Victorian era memorable by their scientific researches.

Alfred Russel Wallace was born on January 8, 1823. His father was of Scottish descent, and believed—on somewhat vague grounds—that he sprang from the stock of the famous Sir William Wallace. Dr. Wallace’s father was an attorney who never practised, having independent means. He dabbled in literature, muddled away his estate, and passed the latter years of his life in rural seclusion, supported by the labour of his children. Alfred Russel Wallace was his seventh child, and was born at Usk, in Monmouthshire, where his first years were passed, and he imbibed his earliest taste for natural history.

#### **AN OMNIVOROUS READER.**

At the age of four he removed with his family to Hertford, where his father became town librarian, and young Wallace spent most of his leisure time browsing among books. At the age of fourteen he left school for London, to lodge with his elder brother John, then apprenticed to a builder in the Hampstead-road, and a few months here had a great influence on his character. His brother spent most evenings at a “Hall of Science” in Tottenham Court-road, and it was here, under the influence of Robert Dale Owen, the pioneer of labour co-operation, that Wallace acquired his interest in land nationalisation and similar movements.

#### **INKLINGS OF SCIENCE.**

It is, however, as a biologist and a co-expositor with Darwin of the evolutionary doctrine that Wallace is best known. The first step in this direction occurred in the summer of 1837, when his brother William, fourteen years his senior, took him to learn land surveying over a great part of Southern England and Wales. Most surveyors are practical geologists, and young Wallace, besides learning the use of surveying and astronomical instruments, became a good practical botanist.

#### **FOREIGN TRAVEL.**

At the age of twenty-one Wallace took a place as usher in a school at Leicester. Here he first became interested in those psychological inquiries which afterwards made him a convinced spiritualist, and made the acquaintance of Henry Walter Bates, afterwards the author of a delightful book of travel. Bates was a great entomologist, and his example and enthusiasm infected Wallace. They decided to undertake a voyage, in the hope of paying expenses by the sale of collections, and extend scientific knowledge of tropical life. In 1848 they sailed for Para in order to explore the valley of the Amazon, and their four years’ experiences gave rise to two books of first-rate importance.

After a brief stay in London, where he enlarged his knowledge of biology and came under the formative influence of Darwin and Huxley, Wallace turned his face to the Malayan Archipelago, and it was during this second journey that he hit upon the great discovery of his life.

Early in 1854 Wallace set sail for Singapore, and the next eight years he spent in studying tropical species and the problems raised by their existence and distribution, and writing a series of valuable and highly important books, beginning with his narrative of travel, "The Malay Archipelago," in 1869.

### **THE EVOLUTION THEORY.**

Wallace, in his solitary rambles, pondered over the cause of characteristics and location of species, just as Darwin had been silently poring over it ever since he returned in 1836 from his voyage in the Beagle. Darwin, with characteristic patience, spent twenty years in elaborating the theory which had flashed across his mind after reading Malthus's "Essay on Population." Wallace hit upon practically the same idea during an attack of fever, which kept him idle at Ternate in 1858. One day something reminded him of Malthus's "Essay," which he had read many years before, and as he has said himself:

It suddenly flashed upon me that this self-acting process would necessarily improve the race, because in every generation the inferior would inevitably be killed off and the superior remain—that is, the fittest would survive. Then at once I seemed to see ... there would be ample time for the change to be effected by the survival of the best fitted in every generation.

In this way every part of an animal's organization could be modified exactly as required, and in the very process of this modification the unmodified would die out, and thus the definite characters and the clear isolation of each new species would be explained.

### **RIVALRY AND CHIVALRY.**

This, of course, was the essential theory of the origin of species by natural selection. Wallace expanded it into a paper fit to be read before the Linnean Society, and sent it to Darwin, with whom he had been in correspondence on these topics. Darwin, with his usual magnanimity, at first intended to hold back his own researches, but Hooker and Lyell dissuaded him from this Quixotic course, and a summary of his own work was read along with Wallace's paper. It is one of Wallace's claims to true greatness of mind that he met Darwin in his own spirit, and recognised both in public and private that the priority of the great discovery was due to the author of "The Origin of Species." But there is no doubt that his own share in the discovery was quite independent of Darwin's work, and his name will always be associated with that of Darwin in the most truly epoch-making research of our time.

### **NO JEALOUSY.**

There was never the slightest ill-feeling or spark of jealousy between the two men. Darwin was the soul of humility and honour. When the "Origin of Species" came out he wrote to Lyell that he had had a letter from Wallace, "very just in his remarks, though too laudatory and too modest, and how admirably free from envy or jealousy! He must be a good fellow."

On the same day he replied to Wallace's communication:—

I admire the generous manner in which you speak of my book. Most persons would, in your position, have felt some envy or jealousy. How nobly free you seem to be of this common failing of mankind. But you speak far too modestly of yourself. You would, if you had my leisure, have done the work just as well, perhaps better, than I have done it.

And so it was to the end, when Wallace, as one of the pall-bearers, accompanied his great colleague to his grave in Westminster Abbey.

In later years he diverged somewhat from Darwin's theory, and in his book on "Darwinism" (1889) he presented a lucid and admirable popular exposition of the theory of organic evolution as it then appeared to his mind.

#### **HIS LATER VERSATILITY.**

The last forty years of Wallace's life were devoted mainly to literary work and lecturing, and do not call for detailed description. He made more than one successful tour in the United States, and excursions into fields of disputation where he hardly showed to the same advantage—in spiritualism, land nationalisation, anti-vaccination, the poverty problems, etc. In "Man's Place in Nature" (1903) he attempted to give scientific reasons for a new edition of the old belief that the earth was the real centre of the universe. None of these divagations can be said to have added to his reputation, nor even his interesting though lengthy autobiography.

Dr. Wallace was married in 1866 to Miss Annie Mitten of Hurstpierpoint, by whom he had two children.

*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2021.