

Transcription (from *Trove*), July 2014:

*The Argus* (Melbourne, Australia) No. 20996 (8 Nov. 1913): 19b. (anon.).

[p. 19]

‘Distinguished scientist.—Dr. Russel Wallace dead.’

London, Nov. 7, 1:20 p.m.

The death is announced of Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, the noted scientist.

Alfred Russel Wallace was born on January 8, 1823. His father was of Scottish descent, and believed that he sprang from the stock of the famous Sir William Wallace. It was as a biologist and a supporter of the evolutionary doctrine that Wallace was best known. The central incident in his life, and the most enduring basis of his fame, was his independent discovery of the part played by natural selection in the origin and development of natural species, which entitled his name to be perpetually coupled with that of Charles Darwin.

At the age of 21 Wallace left the surveying business in which he had been engaged, and became a usher in a school at Leicester. Here he made the acquaintance of the famous naturalist, Henry Walter Bates, afterwards known as the author of most delightful books of travel. Bates was a great entomologist, and his example and enthusiasm led Wallace, who had hitherto contented himself with botany, to undertake the collection of butterflies and beetles. In 1848 they sailed for Para, in order to explore the valley of the Amazon, to which their attention had been directed by the publication in 1847 of Edward’s “Voyage Up the Amazon.” Wallace expanded the theory of the origin of species into a paper to be read before the Linnean Society, and sent it to Darwin, with whom he had been in correspondence on these topics.<sup>1</sup> 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. It is one of Wallace’s claims to greatness 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.

Early in 1854 Wallace went to Singapore, and the next eight years he spent in wandering through the Malay Archipelago, studying attentively the rich and wonderful forms of life which he found there, and meditating on the problems raised by their existence and distribution. His expenses were amply paid by the collections which he periodically sent home for sale, and he acquired a mass of material which he afterwards gave to the world in a series of valuable and highly important books, beginning with his narrative of travel, “The Malay Archipelago,” in 1869, and continued in his works on “Tropical Nature” (1878), “The Geographical Distribution of Animals” (1876), and “Island Life” (1880). But all these contributions to biology pale in importance in comparison with the great discovery which was published during his absence from England, with such results that he returned in 1862 to find his name famous throughout the scientific world, in a place of “high collateral glory” beside the still greater name of Darwin. No man can wander long among the rich exotic forms of life in the Amazon Valley or the Malay Archipelago, without being led to speculate on the fundamental question, how they came into being and acquired their singular characteristics. Wallace, in his solitary rambles, pored over this question, just as Darwin had since he returned in 1836 from his voyage in the “Beagle.”

Dr. Wallace made excursions into other fields, where he hardly showed to the same advantage. Possessed of the true missionary spirit, he was never happier than when maintaining an unpopular dogma, in speech or writing. His book on “Miracles and Modern Spiritualism” (1874, republished with additions in 1901), proclaimed him a believer in the claims of the most advanced “mediums.” In “Land Nationalisation” (1882) he urged a vigorous plea for the State ownership of all land. He also wrote against vaccination, and involved himself in an unfortunate quarrel with the egregious people who maintain that the earth is flat.

Practically up to the last he took an active part in the discussion of scientific subjects, and one of his latest books contains a most interesting treatise on Darwinism particularly directed against the popular misconception that Darwin regarded his theory as antagonistic to Christianity.

<sup>1</sup>[Editor’s note: Actually, Wallace did not indicate to Darwin that he wanted to have the paper read, and published.]

[\[Return\]](#)

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