

Transcription (from hardcopy), March 2016:

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[p. 663d]

[untitled obituary]

During the past week there has passed from amongst us, like a shock of corn fully ripe, the great naturalist who shares with Charles Darwin the honour of discovering the law of natural selection, and to whom we owe the phrase, "Struggle for existence," which during the last fifty years has become part of the current coin of the language. The genius of Alfred Russel Wallace was hardly inferior to that of his great fellow labourer in the field of the origin of species. The story of the manner in which their epoch-making theory was given to the world is a triumphant witness to the way in which the struggle for existence is mitigated by those ethical considerations to which it is the glory of mankind to yield. The discoveries of both men were published in such a way as to leave the honours easy. But there is, I think, one direction in which the verdict of mankind will accord to Wallace even a higher place than Darwin in the history of human thought. Both investigators were absolutely loyal to the inductive and historical method of reaching truth. But there are some—and surely Darwin was one of these—who hesitate to go one step beyond the observation of facts, even when those facts lead up to and suggest conclusions apart from which the facts are not fully intelligible. Wallace, on the other hand, did not fear, in the phrase of Bishop Butler, to "join abstract reasoning with the observation of facts," and so to make his reading of Nature available for practical life. He positively affirmed the little more (and how much it is!), from which Darwin always shrank, and declared that the complexity of living structures demanded the existence of a creative Reason which directs all things towards the realization of an intelligent purpose. The important conclusions of life are not in the facts but just beyond them, and the deepest thinker, like the simplest worker, will not refuse the venture of faith which right reason requires. It is interesting also to recall that Wallace did not regard a survey of the universe as complete unless account were taken of the action of personal beings, other than human minds, which make this world of sensible objects, which it is the business of science to investigate, the theatre of their plans and purposes. Such a view as this, reached by a singularly independent mind along its own lines of inquiry and reflexion, is practically indistinguishable from that spiritual background, which renders the story of the Gospel, to all who acknowledge its reality, not an arbitrary interference with natural law, but a normal revelation of the unseen world. The work of Alfred Russel Wallace is bound to endure because it was wrought on the highest levels. "Render thanks to the Giver."

*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2016.