

*ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE.*

THE last link with the great evolutionary writers of the mid-nineteenth century—the men who transformed the thought of the world—is broken. How can I best speak of the long, happy, hard-working, many-sided life that has just come to a close? The history of Wallace's contributions to science and the details of his career have been long known, and are now re-written and epitomised in the Press of the world. I propose to speak of the man himself as he was revealed to his friends.

I first saw Wallace about twenty-five years ago, introduced by a dear common friend and fellow-worker at the problems of evolution. We were on a short walking-tour, and our road lay through Godalming, where Wallace was then living. From that time I have been happy in his friendship and his kind encouragement and help.

Wallace possessed, like Charles Darwin, a charming personality. He was tall, with a magnificent head, a strong, clear, and pleasant voice, a hearty laugh, a keen sense of humour, an intense and vivid interest in the most varied subjects. But the central secret of his personal magnetism lay in his wide and unselfish sympathy.

It might be thought by those who did not know Wallace that the noble generosity which will always stand as an example before the world was something special—called forth by the illustrious man with whom he was brought into contact. This would be a great mistake. Wallace's attitude was characteristic, and remained characteristic to the end of his life.

A keen young naturalist in the north of England, taking part in an excursion to the New Forest, had called on Wallace and confided to him the dream of his life—a first-hand knowledge of tropical nature. When I visited Old Orchard in the summer of 1903, I found that Wallace was intently interested in two things: his garden, and the means by which his young friend's dream might best be realised. He then, and later on in many a letter, eagerly discussed the most favourable localities, the scientific memoirs to be carried, the means by which the journey could be undertaken, the disposal of collections, and every circumstance that would be likely to affect the success of the expedition. The subject was referred to in seventeen letters to the present writer: it formed the sole topic of some of them. It was a grand and inspiring thing to see this great man identifying himself heart and soul with the interests of one—till then a stranger—in whom he recognised the passionate longings of his own youth. By the force of sympathy he re-lived in the life of another the splendid years of early manhood.

In 1889, when the degree of D.C.L. was conferred upon him, Wallace stayed with us, and I was anxious to show him something of Oxford; but, with all that there is to be seen, one subject alone absorbed the whole of his interest. He was intensely anxious to find the rooms where Grant Allen had lived. He had received from Grant Allen's father a manuscript poem giving a picture of the ancient city dimly seen at midnight from an undergraduate's rooms. With the help of Grant Allen's college friends we were able to visit every house in which he had lived, but were forced to conclude that the poem was written in the rooms of a friend or from an imaginary point of view.

Of Wallace's energy and love of work much might be written. About ten years ago, at the age of eighty, he moved from Parkstone to Old Orchard, Broadstone, having himself superin-

tended the building of the house and the laying out of the garden. In a letter written May 31, 1903, he speaks of "the charming 'lodge in the wilderness' I have got here in which to end my days on earth. I assure you I am enjoying it, perhaps more than I should ever have done at an earlier period." How entirely this happy anticipation was fulfilled is well shown by the following words written March 13, 1911, when Wallace was more than eighty-eight:—

But what I am mainly at work (or at *play*) upon now is my garden, and I have suddenly developed a sad *mania* for Alpine plants, more especially for my old favourites, the genus *Primula*, which has received such wonderful additions lately from the Himalayas, but more particularly from N. China. My resuscitated hobby is due to my having now, the very *first* time in my life, a bit of ground really *suitable* for them, combining *shelter*, good aspects, a moist (even *boggy* in parts) subsoil, a moister atmosphere, and a good and varied soil. The new *Primulas* introduced by Veitch, Bees, and several others are so grand and charming that I have raised some from seed, and have applied for others (and for *Alpines* generally) to Kew, Edinburgh, Cambridge, and Dublin Botanical Gardens, and have already got such a fine lot of plants—about 20 species of *Primulas* and 150 of *Alpines* generally—with promises of more, that I am laying out a regular Alpine and bog garden, on a quite small scale, buying stone and stone chippings by the ton or truck-load, collecting sand and road scrapings, protecting against rabbits, &c., which all give me very interesting occupation, so filling up my time and powers of work that I have little time or energy for reading anything but newspapers, novels, and the regular supply of scientific or political periodicals.

And Wallace invoked for his friends the power which brought youth and happiness to his old age. "Many happy returns (and lots of work)," were his birthday wishes to the writer in 1909.

With the love of work we must above all associate the enthusiasm which Wallace put into all that he did—the bright, boyish spirit which shone in him as it did in Darwin. "I've enjoyed every minute of the time. Why, he has the spirit of a boy of eighteen!" was my daughter's comment on an afternoon spent at Old Orchard in the autumn of 1906. No youth gazing for the first time on the wonders of nature in the tropics could feel more enthusiasm than is expressed in Wallace's words describing a visit to the Natural History Museum on the morning after his Friday evening lecture at the Royal Institution in January, 1909:—

I had a delightful two hours at the museum on Saturday morning, as Mr. Rothschild brought from Tring several of his glass-bottomed drawers with his finest New Guinea butterflies. They *were* a treat! I never saw anything more lovely and interesting!

The history of that Friday evening lecture—Wallace's last appearance before the scientific public—is given in the following passage, which is of interest in many ways, and recalls especially the famous 1858 essay—thought out in two hours and completed in three evenings. When the promise to the Royal Institution was made known, I addressed a friendly remonstrance to Wallace

for having refused to lecture in Oxford. He replied November 6, 1908:—

I am a believer in *inspiration*. All my best ideas have come to me *suddenly*. I had quite determined to decline *this* one [invitation] when, lying on my couch, an *idea* suddenly came to me! I saw that the subject had *never* been treated from *that* point of view—I felt that I *could* and should *like* so to treat it, and that it would suit the audience and *do good*. So I accepted. I hope I shall be able to do it justice.

The late Aubrey Moore, in a remarkable address delivered thirty years ago to the Church Congress in Reading—an address noticed in the columns of *NATURE*—spoke with disparagement of a mind “built like a modern ironclad in watertight compartments.” But the criticism does not apply when the sliding doors are kept in good working order by constant use.

Wallace was keenly interested in many subjects—psychical, political, and economic—that would not attract the majority of the readers of *NATURE*. With those who met him in the field of biological and especially of evolutionary inquiry, the whole of the intercourse was filled to overflowing with the give-and-take of friendly discussion. The opportunities that came all too rarely would have been wasted in argument over fundamental differences or in the vain attempt to reconcile divergent tastes. All such subjects were therefore shut out.

“I am still very busy,” he wrote, February 23, 1903, “and all the time I can spare from the garden I give to a new book I am writing—a kind of pot-boiler—though one that I am *immensely* interested in, but that you will not care about.”

Many will doubtless be inclined to think, with the writer of the article last week (*NATURE*, p. 322), that Wallace's views on Mendelism were a product of the intellectual rigidity of old age. The facts here brought forward, to which numbers more might have been added, prove, however, that he retained his vitality and elasticity and keenness to a degree that was perfectly marvellous. With regard to Mendelism, he felt, as many far younger men feel, that it is both interesting and important, but that from the first it has been put in a wrong light, and erroneously used as a weapon of attack upon other subjects to which it is not in any way antagonistic.

His attitude towards “Mutation” was different; for here he knew that all the essential facts had been long pondered over by a greater mind than that of any living naturalist. Thus he wrote, July 27, 1907:—

Mutation as a theory is absolutely nothing new—only the assertion that new species originate *always* in sports—for which the evidence adduced is the most meagre and inconclusive of any ever set forth with such pretentious claims!

And again on March 1, 1909, he used words with which a firm believer in natural selection as the motive cause of evolution may fitly conclude:—

I have no doubt, however, it will all come right in the *end*—though the end may be far off, and in

the meantime we must simply go on, and show, at every opportunity, that Darwinism actually *does explain* whole fields of phenomena that they [Mutationists] do not even attempt to deal with, or even to approach.  
E. B. P.