

BIOGRAPHIES.

VIII. Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, o.m., F.R.S.

[Published November 17th, 1913.]

The last Singapore papers contained the news of the death of A. R. Wallace, the great naturalist, scientist and philosopher, which took place on November 8th. Alfred Russel Wallace was born on January 8th, 1823, at Usk in Monmouthshire. His early years were spent in the work of land-surveying, an occupation he followed for seven years with his brother. After none too much success in earning a living as schoolmaster for a time, or by surveying, he made friends with H. W. Bates, a naturalist, and together they sailed for South America in 1848. Their idea was to explore the little known region of the Amazon and earn a living by the sale of natural history specimens which they collected there. After four years of this, he returned to England and wrote a book on his travels; but his taste for natural history soon led him to look about for fresh regions to explore, and learning that the Malay Archipelago offered about the richest and at the same time the least-known field for this work, he set sail again in 1854. After spending some time in Malacca and Singapore, he went over to Sarawak as the guest of Sir James Brooke, arriving here in November 1854, just fifty-nine years ago.

He spent some fourteen months in this country, making expeditions to Santubong, Serambu and Sadong (Simunjan). At the latter place he stayed nine months and in his "Life" (written in 1905) he speaks of it as "the best locality for beetles I found during my twelve years' tropical collecting". The coal mines were being opened there at that time by a

Mr. Coulson, mining engineer. On leaving Sarawak he travelled through the islands of the Malay Archipelago as far as New Guinea; his journeys in this part of the world lasting eight years, during which time he formed enormous collections of natural history specimens, especially of insects, of which hundreds were described as new species. His "Malay Archipelago" tells us of his experiences; probably no other book of travel and adventure has been more widely read than this, and many are the naturalists to-day who owe their first awakened interest in tropical nature to its pages.

Wallace's name, however, is destined to be handed down to posterity not so much on account of his travels, but because of his association with Charles Darwin in formulating the theory of Natural Selection. Although the idea of Evolution or mutability of species, by which different forms of life were evolved from previously existing simpler forms, was not a new one, the old belief in the separate creation and immutability of each species was practically universal. In 1858, Darwin and Wallace published a short article before the Linnean Society in London explaining the ways and means of evolution by their theory of Natural Selection. In 1859 this was followed by the production of Darwin's work, "The Origin of Species", which entirely revolutionized the world of thought. Although other theories—some feasible, many not,—complementing or partly correcting the theory of Darwin and Wallace have been propounded from time to time, the whole basis of the present work and thought of science is due to their researches.

It is interesting for us in Sarawak to remember that an earlier essay, on the formation of new species, foreshadowing the more important one of 1858, was prepared by Wallace during his stay in Sarawak and actually written by him at Santubong in February 1855.

He returned in 1862 and busied himself working out his collections and writing books on his travels, of

which the better known are "Island Life", "Tropical Nature", "Darwinism", and "Geographical Distribution of Animals", besides the "Malay Archipelago" already mentioned. His interests, however, were by no means confined to Natural History, as he wrote many articles on Spiritualism and socialistic questions, of which Land Nationalization may be mentioned as one that interested him for many years. One of his last works, entitled "The World of Life", appeared as recently as 1910.

The writer of this note had the privilege of meeting him just a year ago in his quiet home at Broadstone in Dorsetshire. He expressed keen interest in Sarawak and mentioned having travelled home in the same boat with "the young Rajah" in 1862. He was also glad to hear that the *maias* (*Orang utan*) is still to be found at Sadong, not yet driven out by the marches of civilization.

Sarawak should be proud to remember her connection with A. R. Wallace, the distinguished scientist, whose long and eventful life has now drawn to a close.