

but not well-off English parents who had moved to Wales a couple of years earlier. They returned to England (Hertford) when Wallace was 5 or 6, and his only formal schooling took place there. A final financial collapse in late 1836 broke up the family, and young Alfred was forced to leave school. For the next 10 years, he worked as an apprentice in the surveying, building, and mapmaking trades, though, during a slow period in 1844–1845, he also taught elementary classes at a private school in Leicester. Meanwhile, he had begun to take an interest in collecting natural history specimens, especially after 1844, when he met Henry Walter Bates, another prominent naturalist-to-be, in Leicester. In 1847, the two decided to mount a natural history collecting expedition to the Amazon River basin.

They arrived in Brazil in April 1848 but soon split up, with Wallace concentrating on birds and insects of the central Amazon and Rio Negro. Wallace was already a committed transmutationist, but after 4 years in the Amazon, he had not recognized a mechanism that could explain evolutionary change. In poor health, he returned to England, but on the way, his ship caught fire and sank, taking 2 years of his collections down with it. Wallace and the crew were rescued 10 days later. Luckily, his collections were insured, and this permitted him to continue on with his researches 18 months later, this time in the East Indies (then known as “the Malay Archipelago”).

Starting in Singapore in April 1854, Wallace had fabulous success over the next 8 years, sending home more than 125,000 specimens, again mainly of birds and insects, and recording important details of the region’s faunas and peoples. While in the field, he wrote and published three seminal papers: (1) in 1855, “On the Law Which Has Regulated the Introduction of New Species” (an early evolutionary tract considered one of the first modern biogeographical studies); (2) in 1858, “On the Tendency for Varieties to Depart Indefinitely From the Original Type” (the “Ternate” natural selection article that sent Darwin scurrying to complete his *On the Origin of Species*); and (3) in 1859, “On the Zoological Geography of the Malay Archipelago” (outlining his discovery of “Wallace’s Line,” the most famous biogeographical boundary).

On returning home in the spring of 1862, Wallace settled down to a long career of writing, lecturing, and irritating any social institution that he felt was trampling on the rights of ordinary

WALLACE, ALFRED R.

Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913), British naturalist, evolutionist, geographer, anthropologist, and reformer, was a central figure in the emergence of the theory of evolution by natural selection, an important contributor to several other natural history and social science subjects, and an influential social critic.

Biography

Wallace was born on January 8, 1823, at Usk, Monmouthshire, Wales, the son of middle-class

people. Until about 1881, his emphasis was natural history, especially biogeography and evolutionary theory. During this period, Wallace wrote four legacy-generating books: *The Malay Archipelago* (1869), *The Geographical Distribution of Animals* (1876), *Tropical Nature and Other Essays* (1878), and *Island Life* (1880). His attention then gravitated more toward social issues, beginning with land reform but eventually extending to political institution reform, monetary policy, anti-vaccinationism, labor problems, and other topics. In 1889, he published the highly successful book *Darwinism*. Later in life, he became interested in astronomy, with his books *Man's Place in the Universe* (1903) and *Is Mars Habitable?* (1907) tackling subjects that are still of interest today.

Wallace married Annie Mitten in 1866, and together they had three children. Except for a few short trips to Europe and a lecture tour around North America in 1886–1887, Wallace stayed close to home after 1862. He remained active to the end, publishing two further social criticism tracts in his final year (at the age of 90). Wallace was well honored during his lifetime with two honorary doctorates, Royal Society membership, several major medals, and the Order of Merit. Wallace died peacefully at his home in Wimborne, Dorset, England, on November 7, 1913, several months before the onset of the First World War.

Wallace's Anthropology Work

As an anthropologist, Wallace is best known for his work in physical anthropology. His observations on Amazon monkeys yielded an important early theory relating speciation to the influence of river barriers; a few years later, he famously studied the field habits of orangutans on the island of Borneo. In 1864, his milestone paper "The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man Deduced From the Theory of 'Natural Selection'" became the first important treatment relating natural selection to race differentiation. Later, some of his theories on racial origins became influential.

Still, one might argue that his contributions to social and cultural anthropology are just as interesting, if not as well-known. Wallace explored all aspects of evolution, from astronomical cosmology to human social systems. His earliest writings are on subjects such as the uses of varied forms of

knowledge, mesmerism, improving library collections and environs, emigration, the perils of national isolationism, and the daily affairs of Welsh farmers—all completed years before his first scientific publication in 1850. Wallace's two books from his Amazon travel days are heavily ethnographic. *A Narrative of Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro* (1853) includes an appendix of native vocabularies, a separate chapter on aboriginal ethnography, and plentiful accounts of their daily routines, while *Palm Trees of the Amazon and Their Uses* (1853) plies an ethnobotanical course.

Wallace's Australasian studies also had a strong ethnographic side. He paid special attention to residents' spiritual beliefs, local economies and technologies, relations with colonial authorities, racial affinities, moral persuasions, and, once more, vocabularies. Much of this observation is thoughtfully condensed in his *The Malay Archipelago* (1869), one of modern history's great masterpieces of regional description. Later in life, Wallace used his knowledge of tropical peoples to regularly criticize both institutional treatments of them and his colleagues' often racist appreciations. In a 1906 article, for example, he condemned society's selfish treatment of the Polynesians, concluding, "What we have actually done, and left undone, resulting in the degradation and lingering extermination of so fine a people, is one of the most pathetic of . . . tragedies" (p. 182).

It must not be overlooked that Wallace was one of his period's most vocal spiritualists. In a letter in 1866 to T. H. Huxley (the same year Wallace was made the first president of the Anthropology Department at the British Association for the Advancement of Science meetings), he characterized spiritualism as "a new branch of Anthropology." In Wallace's view, material change organized by rote under natural selection was augmented by intelligent spiritualistic influences.

Wallace's Legacy in Anthropology

Having for many years been cited as the "Grand Old Man of Science," Wallace was possibly the most famous scientist in the world in his old age. Wallace's general renown beyond scientific circles would not have been possible without his increasing attention to social issues as he aged. Two early events established this trajectory: (1) at the age of 14, he fell in with a group of followers of the

utopian socialist reformer Robert Owen, who would later inform his approach to social organization, and (2) later, in the 1850s, he read Herbert Spencer's *Social Justice*, which profoundly affected his views on fairness within social institutions. He was also impressed early on by the ideas of George Combe, Robert Dale Owen, John Stuart Mill, and Emanuel Swedenborg.

These influences, added to his middle-class upbringing and years among primitive peoples, gave Wallace a rather unique worldview. He was one of the least racist of all 19th-century investigators, believing that, on average, less technologically advanced peoples' ethical and moral standards were not inferior to those held elsewhere. He also considered aboriginal peoples to be on a par intellectually with Europeans, although lacking the education to optimize those skills. His general philosophical position might be described as "socialist-libertarian": He believed in collective organizing for the common good, but not at the expense of overbearing forms of governmental control.

Wallace had no academic affiliations or students. But, as an engaging and forceful writer in his later years, his opinions on social and moral issues were in constant demand. Many of his diatribes on matters such as militarism, women's rights, eugenics, missionary work, colonial politics, imprisonment, the plight of the poor, immigration, and institutional religion remain fresh sounding even today. Indeed, his positions have been cited as squarely foreshadowing the "liberal agenda" program of the following century. In a 2010 article, K. B. Lowrey went so far as to identify Wallace as an ideal "ancestor figure" for contemporary anthropology.

Charles H. Smith

See also Darwin, Charles; Nineteenth-Century Evolutionary Anthropology; Spencer, Herbert; Westermarck, Edward

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