

A PROPHETIC PERSONALITY

“**T**HERE were giants in those days.” So each generation of men has said, looking back.

We are saying it again now, for we associate the name of Alfred Russell Wallace with the names of Darwin and Spencer, of Tyndall and Huxley, or even, sometimes, with the earlier names of Lyall and Mill. With them he shares the glory of the greatest intellectual revolution since Galileo. With Darwin he divides the fame of first historians of the human race.

Yet a certain inadequacy in that account of Wallace which assigns him place as “the last of the Victorians” is significant. We who participate in the mental turmoil of today cannot see it objectively and synthetically, as we see the intellectual life of the past, as those who live after us will see what we are creating now. The doctrine of evolution has not only reconstructed our view of all that has been; it is reconstructing our dreams of what shall be. It is re-shaping our plans; it is directing our efforts to convert the struggle for existence into progressive achievement.

Wallace was not only the investigator, the man of science; he was also the dreamer and the seer. He was more versatile than any of his earlier contemporaries. His mind ranged widely, and he indulged its varying moods. He could do this without prejudice to his more serious tasks, for his energy was exhaustless. His sympathies flowed in every direction, years could not repress his youthfulness, and he remained temperamentally, as intellectually, a radical to the end.

Because of these qualities he was a man of more than one age in his intellectual activity, as he was in span of life. Discoverer and creator with others of the evolutionist interpretation, and living on long after those others were gone, he threw himself into the larger work of applying the interpretation to the tremendous problems of the further development of mankind. We should not know where to look among the world's greatest men for a figure more worthy to be called unique. There is something curiously static in the aspect of human lives in retrospect. They take and keep their places in a portrait gallery. Alfred Russell Wallace will live in the biographical page as an untiring personality, pushing on.

How far his speculations in other realms than those of natural science were true, does not matter. At least he felt the impulse that is urging thoughtful minds today to find a concept of reality large and plastic enough to accommodate both the inductions of objective

science and the self-conscious will to live more abundantly. His socialistic and eugenist proposals were tentative and crude, as he himself well knew, but they were the sincere essays of a fearless man in earnest, to grapple with tasks that cannot be evaded, and which will be mastered only thru much experiment and at painful cost.

Was he then the last of giants gone, or was he also quite as much the prophecy of splendid minds and daring souls to be? Logically, as evolutionists, we are bound to make the optimistic answer. But life is more than logic, more even than is dreamed of in our most embracing philosophies. So we prefer to put it in a more human way. Wallace was above all human. Of all the great men of his time, or times, he was, with the single exception of Huxley, the most human. He was generous, spontaneous, uncalculating. And so, most naturally, he exemplified his evolutionist creed. In the life of the individual, as in the life of the race, he found no sudden break, and no place to stop. His unwearying search for truth could not end with any achievement. Gracefully, and, it would seem, unconsciously, he pushed on from one well-rounded period of our human enterprise into the work of another, large with uncertainty, but large also with hope and promise.

There will be others like him. The giants are not dead. They are living and wrestling now. We who live and work with them do not know them. But when they are gone the men that are to be will look back and say, as we say now, “There were giants in those days.”

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