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[p. 7c]

**‘Great Scientist’s Death Near Wimborne. Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace. Co-Discoverer with Darwin. Theory of Natural Selection. A Simple Funeral.’**

Full of years and honours, Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, O.M., L.L.D., D.C.L., F.R.S. (whose serious illness was first announced in last week’s “Western Gazette”), died at his residence, Old Orchard, Broadstone, near Wimborne, on Friday, at 9:25 a.m. The veteran scientist’s illness only lasted from the previous Monday, when an attack of ague was followed by drowsiness, and on Thursday the active brain lapsed into a state of coma, from which there was no recovery, and without regaining consciousness Mr. Wallace peacefully passed away in the presence of wife, son, and daughter. His medical attendant (Dr. Norman) certified that death was due to old age—the “Grand Old Man of Science,” the last of the great British naturalists of the nineteenth century, of the men who opened new eras in biological science—Darwin, Hooker, Galton—would have been 91 had he lived to January 8<sup>th</sup> next.

Dr. Wallace did not permit age to interfere with work, and despite the fact that he had passed his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, he was vigorous and hale until quite recently, retaining his intellectual vigour and a measure of physical strength which would do credit to many a man half his age; indeed, he was an almost ceaseless worker. At the age of 83 he was writing his biography; it is more than half-a-century since the great naturalist wrote his first book of “Travels on the Amazon,” and he was a prolific contributor to scientific publications. As a rule he managed two steady hours every morning; in the afternoon he took a quiet doze, or contented himself watching Poole Harbour, a charming view of which is obtained from his library window, or enjoying in his wild garden and greenhouse the contemplation of the endless diversities of plant life. In the evening he was ready for another spell of writing or study. It was only the other day he brought out a volume on “Democracy,” and he had more literary ventures in view. Till the end of his life he maintained the keenest interest in scientific and sociological questions.

**LAST OF THE GREAT VICTORIANS.**

Dr. Wallace was the last of the Titans of the Victorian era of scientific discovery. Mr. Gladstone granted him a Civil List pension of £200 a year, and King Edward that rare honour, the Order of Merit.

Co-discoverer with Darwin of the principle of natural selection, he was something more than a mere student of embryology, and showed up to the last a keen sympathy with those measures which had for their object the betterment of human conditions.

Russel Wallace had no advantages of birth and education. Born at Usk, Monmouthshire, on Jan. 8, 1823, of Scottish and Huguenot origin, he started as an architect and land surveyor, later becoming a schoolmaster at Leicester. Here he met Mr. H. W. Bates, the entomologist, and, fired by Darwin’s “Journal,” together they planned an expedition to the Amazon, “in order to observe Nature and make a living by collecting.”

For four years—1848-1852—the two naturalists, whose limited means had been almost exhausted by the cost of the sailing vessel they had hired, searched the then unknown waters of Brazil's mighty river, cut off from the outside world. Together<sup>1</sup> they amassed a unique collection of specimens of the insect life, but Wallace lost the major part of his during the journey home. Both wrote books, however, which were read with avidity by a growing circle of admirers whose imaginations were moved by the wonders of the virgin forest.

#### DARWIN FORESTALLED.

In 1854 Wallace departed on his travels fresh, and spent an adventurous eight years in Malaya, where rough Dyaks plied their piratical trade, rarely troubled by British gunboats. But the indomitable naturalist passed unscathed through these dangers only to be stricken down with fever.

While he was lying on a bed of sickness, in 1858, at Ternate, in the Moluccas, his mind happened to dwell upon Malthus's "Essay on Population," which he had read some years previously. Almost at a flash the idea of the survival of the fittest came to him, and in an incredibly short space of time he had thought out the complete theory, and, working at high pressure, he prepared his complete essay on the subject in three evenings.

Wallace sent his essay to Darwin, who received it on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1858.<sup>2</sup> In the covering letter Darwin was asked for his opinion, and also requested to forward the essay for a similar purpose to Sir Charles Lyell (father of Mr. Charles Lyell, M.P., a former Liberal representative for East Dorset). Twenty years earlier, by promptings also received from Malthus's work, Darwin himself had come to the conclusion that "selection was the keystone of man's success." He wrote in his diary<sup>3</sup> at the time:—

"Under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavourable ones to be destroyed. The result of this would be the formation of new species. Here, then, I had a theory by which to work.

He had made a beginning with the subject, and had communicated his plans to Sir Charles Lyell and Sir Joseph Hooker. When, therefore, he forwarded Wallace's MS. to Sir Charles Lyell, he wrote "Your words have come true with a vengeance—that I should be forestalled. I never saw a more striking coincidence. If Wallace had my MS. sketch written out in 1842 he could not have made a better short abstract. Even his terms now stand as heads of my chapters."

#### RETURNED TO FIND HIMSELF FAMOUS.

At this time Wallace was only thirty-five, whilst Darwin was forty-nine. Darwin acted in a most honourable and disinterested fashion. He referred the whole matter to his two friends, Lyell and Hooker, and even offered to place on one side his own contribution; but the latter decided that Wallace's essay should be sent to the Linnean Society in conjunction with a summary of Darwin's conclusions. The whole communication was read before the Linnean Society on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1858, a joint essay containing some new phrases, which were destined to live as scientific terms. Wallace was responsible for the phrase "struggle for existence,"<sup>4</sup> while to Darwin belonged the coinage of "natural selection."

Wallace returned from the East to find himself famous, and many of the fine specimens he brought home are still to be seen at the British and the Oxford University Museums.

## DARING VIEWS.

But biology was only one of many branches of science which engaged the attention of Dr. Wallace, whose mind had always been characterised by a rare receptivity and accessibility to new ideas—some of which greatly shocked his more orthodox fellows. Thus he was, among other things, a convinced believer in phrenology and an ardent spiritualist, while some years ago he startled astronomers by adopting the old geocentric theory of the universe. He firmly believed that the sun occupies the centre of the sidereal system, and that our own earth is the only possible abode of life and intelligence in the universe. Authorities never counted much with him. Indeed, he was led long ago to the conclusion that “whenever the scientific men of any age disbelieve other men’s careful observations without enquiry, the scientific men are always wrong.”

Dr. Wallace was the author of “Darwinism,” “The Malay Archipelago,” “Tropical Nature,” “The Geographical Distribution of Animals,” “Island Life,” not to mention innumerable other scientific essays, and was generally the most outspoken and daring theorist of the age. As the author of “Miracles and Modern Spiritualism,” he declared that “Spiritualism is an experimental science, and affords the only sure foundation for a true philosophy, a pure religion.” He devoted a volume to prove that probably the earth alone of worlds is inhabited by rational beings like man. In his “Wonderful Century”—the nineteenth—he points to such failures as “Neglect of Phrenology” and “Vaccination a Delusion.”

While speaking as a Socialist, he hailed Mr. Lloyd George as “a wonderful man—a wizard.” He told an interviewer that for the working class “everything is as bad as it can be; the vast accumulations of wealth are criminal. The unborn heir should have no rights; the State should inherit the property and provide for him, and the vast flow of accumulated wealth would endow the nation with a sufficiency for all.”

## GOLD AND HUMAN LIFE.

“In our mad race for wealth,” he wrote, “we have made gold more sacred than human life; we have made life so hard for the many that suicide, insanity, and crime are alike increasing.” In these matters his facts are often wrong, the deductions erroneous, and the proposed remedies impossible. He never hesitated to avow any opinion, however unpopular it might be. He declared himself “an extreme Radical,” and was, indeed, a Socialist, who proclaimed land nationalisation as one of the chief remedies of our social ills. With this view he helped to found, and became president of, the Land Nationalisation Society. Equally fearless was he in science. Dr. Wallace was utterly opposed to the theories that pass under the name of Eugenics, and to the schemes for reforming mankind founded thereon, denouncing them as “the meddlesome interference of an arrogant scientific priesthood.”

His religious opinions were unorthodox. He said to an interviewer, “I have always felt, like Herbert Spencer, that God is Unknowable and Unthinkable. I do not hold any Christian doctrines whatever.”

Professor Wallace, prior to taking up his residence at Broadstone, in a picturesquely-situated house, which he had built for himself, for many years lived at Parkstone, to which he removed from Godalming in 1889. Only a fortnight ago he paid a visit to a week-end cottage which he had taken at Worth Matravers, a Purbeck village on the coast of the English Channel, equi-distant four miles from Swanage and Corfe Castle.

Dr. Wallace married, in 1866, the eldest daughter of Mr. William Mitten, of Hurstpierpoint, said to be “the greatest living authority on mosses,” by whom he had two children.<sup>5</sup>

#### THE FUNERAL. STRIKINGLY SIMPLE CEREMONY. SOCIALIST’S GRAVESIDE PROTEST.

By the wish of Dr. Wallace, the funeral, which took place on Monday afternoon at Broadstone, was of the simplest character possible, and besides the immediate relatives and representatives of some of the famous societies with which the deceased was connected, there were only a few residents of Broadstone and neighbourhood present—either at the Parish Church of St. John the Baptist, where the first part of the service was conducted, or at the Cemetery, where in a grave unrelieved by any flowers the remains of the veteran scientist were laid to rest. The Bishop of Salisbury, who is in residence at Broadstone, and who, by the way, has not completely recovered from the chill which prevented him fulfilling engagements last week, conducted the initial part of the service, the Rev. R. P. Shiner, who has charge of the parish during the Vicar’s illness, officiating at the graveside. The oak coffin bore on a brass plate the simple inscription:—

“Alfred Russel  
Wallace  
Died November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1913.  
Aged 90 years.”

The chief mourners were Mr. W. G. Wallace (son), Miss Wallace (daughter), and Miss Mitten (sister-in-law), whilst amongst those also present were Professors Poulton, Mendola, and Dukinfield Scott, and Dr. C. W. Andrews (of the Natural History section of the British Museum), representing the Royal and the Linnean Societies; Mr. Joseph Hyder, attending on behalf of the Land Nationalisation Society, of which deceased was president; Messrs. B. J. Waddington and R. E. Sherring, Bournemouth Natural Science Society; the Rev. J. Marchant, representing Sir W. F. Barrett, F.R.S., and Messrs. Cassell, publishers; Mr. Wm. Carter (Upper Parkstone), Mr. D. Hartley (secretary) and Mr. H. Hodges, Bournemouth Spiritualists’ Society, of which Dr. Wallace was president; Mr. and Mrs. J. Lee and Mr. M. Walters, Bournemouth branch British Socialist Society; Messrs. A. Graham (Sheffield), J. Wilson (Halifax), Colonel Nicholl (Parkstone), Mr. Spencer (St. Neots), Dr. W. Grylls Adams (formerly principal of London University), Messrs. H. Preston, H. J. Everest, S. C. Atkey, C. G. Clark, Wm. Wheeler, F. L. French, G. S. Russell, F. Burrow, and Frank Brown (deceased’s faithful man-servant).

Amongst the floral tributes was a wreath—the only token of a public character—“With sincerest respect from members and friends of the Spiritualists’ Society, Bournemouth,” whilst placed on the coffin were wreaths, &c., formed of flowers gathered from rare plants which Dr. Wallace had grown under glass at his residence, for the first time in England, and specimens of which the distinguished scientist had sent to the famous Kew Gardens. Reminding one of Dr. Wallace’s journeys in the Malay Archipelago, the flowers included the fragrant blue Amazon water lily.

The service over, and most of the mourners having left the Cemetery, a man, who proclaimed himself to be a representative of the Socialist party—he was wearing a red necktie—standing at the graveside, made a speech in which he expressed surprise at the meagre attendance at the funeral of such a great man, and protested against the plain, undemonstrative farewell, saying that it was felt by many that the remains should have been deposited beside Darwin in Westminster Abbey.

Scores of letters have been received by the family from scientists and hundreds of working-men. “I feel,” writes one of the latter from Nottingham, “as if I have lost more than a friend. When I saw the photograph and the heading in the newspaper I could read no more.” Many other letters from humble folk are pitched in the same key.

It has been decided to ask Mr. J. Seymour Lucas, R.A., to proceed with a subscription portrait of the late Dr. Wallace that he had undertaken, using the materials available, and to present the picture to the nation. Mr. Balfour and Lord Haldane are among the subscribers.

<sup>1</sup>[Editor’s note: Bates and Wallace worked “together” for only a small percentage of the four years the latter was in South America. Bates stayed a total of eleven years.]

<sup>2</sup>[Editor’s note: The June 18 date is questioned by some.]

<sup>3</sup>[Editor’s note: This quotation is from Darwin’s short autobiography, written about 1876.]

<sup>4</sup>[Editor’s note: Actually, this phrase had been in general use for many years before Wallace used it in the Ternate essay.]

<sup>5</sup>[Editor’s note: A third child died at a young age.]

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