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ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE. MEMORIAL PORTRAIT AT SOUTH KENSINGTON

A memorial portrait of Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, the illustrious naturalist, and joint author, with Darwin, of the theory of natural selection, was unveiled on Saturday [23 June] at the Natural History Museum, South Kensington, by Sir Charles S. Sherrington, President of the Royal Society. The present year is the centenary of Dr. Wallace's birth.

Sir James Marchant offered the portrait to the trustees on behalf of the memorial committee, and after unveiling it Sir Charles Sherrington said:--“The portrait that has a fitting place within the walls of this building in memory of Alfred Russel Wallace will be cherished for many reasons here. To those great collections for which this building is the house and the shrine he contributed generously and largely. Much of the fruit that he gathered in his expeditions in the Malay Archipelago enriches the galleries here. But he did even more for this collection and for all collections of natural history throughout the world by contributing a renowned and fertile idea which has lent and lends them a further significance and a new meaning. He contributed an interpretation which forms a guiding thread to a great deal of the study which such collections as this render possible. He and his great compeer (Darwin), by whose statue we stand now, gave a further setting to the whole of the arrangements of such a museum as we are now in, and much of their interpretation, much of their study, bears, further, the great interest that it has applications even to human society itself. To Wallace, ardent, relatively young, intensely curious into the economy of nature, and faced with the prodigality, the almost wasteful luxuriance of nature in the tropics, there arose the idea to which has been given a term that has passed into common parlance – the ‘struggle of existence’ in animate nature in relation to and in its bearing upon the origin of all that astounding, varied manifoldness of feature that the world exhibits – the origin of species. And that idea, taking its growth from him and from his great, his illustrious friend and colleague, has since that time, since he formulated it even briefly, been, I suppose, and stands still, the dominant underlying motive that guides the study and arrangement of these collections. I suppose that that happy circumstance of the juxtaposition of the portrait that we see there and of the statue by which we are standing represents in collocation the commemoration of two men of whom it may be said, perhaps, that never a day passes but their two names rise to the memories of the director and the distinguished staff who are with him to study and to help others to study these collections. Circumstances arranged that the discoveries of these two men came, as it were, at the same moment and on the very same theme side by side before the scientific world. Such an attendant circumstance might, in some cases, have proved an embarrassment to one or other of them, but, as we all know, instead of being an embarrassment it formed a bond of generous association between them, each one of them striving to exalt the merits of the other. That part of the history of science will ever remain as a noble and inspiring feature connected with the work of these two men. Therefore the picture that we have there is not only a memorial of one whose memory is part of the historic treasure of science, but it will also be an abiding source of inspiration for the future, inasmuch as it represents a noble trait of character as well as genius, which went together in the personality of Alfred Russel Wallace.”

Professor E. B. Poulton, F.R.S., spoke on Wallace's life and work, and also bore testimony to his generous character and to the enthusiasm with which he entered into and promoted the scientific work of others; and the Archbishop of Canterbury expressed the ready welcome which the trustees gave to that striking portrait of a remarkable man.

Among those present were:--

Trustees:-- The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Speaker, Viscount Dillon, Viscount Ullswater, Lord Rothschild, Lord Sterndale, Sir R. D. Rolleston, Professor G. Gilbert Murray, and Mr. F. Cavendish-Bentinck.

Members of the Memorial Committee:- Sir James Marchant, Sir C. S. Sherrington, and Professor E. B. Poulton.

Members of the family and friends:- Mr. W. G. Wallace, Miss Wallace, Mrs. Meldola, widow of Professor Meldola, who was one of the memorial committee; Mrs. Mitten, Dr. Chalmers Mitchell and Mr. J. W. Beaufort (the painter of the portrait). There was also a full attendance of the Museum staff.