

ten thousand years old, and see ! what little progress it has made in ten thousand years. In fact, the house men live in is much over ten thousand years old ; but the world of men who live in it is not a hundred years old. Each new generation comes upon the earth as devoid of character as the previous generation. The progress of humanity is to be measured by the progress made by each individual man between the cradle and the grave. If a traveler were to return to his native village after an absence of fifty years, and visit the primary school, and were to see the children four or five years of age painfully learning to spell and read and write, much as he was doing half a century before, and thereupon should conclude that the school was doing nothing for the boys and girls, he would fall into the same blunders that the pessimist falls into when he concludes that life is doing nothing for men and women because men and women are committing the same sins and are painfully learning the same lessons as their ancestors of a thousand years ago.

THE FALLACY OF PESSIMISM

Dr. Wallace in his latest book¹ charmingly illustrates the resources of the resolute pessimist. Select the best quotations you can find in ancient pagan literature expressive of high ideals, and the most sordid illustrations you can find of a degraded and tragic life in the slums of our great cities, and put them in contrast with each other, and assume that the first are typical of ancient paganism and the second are typical of modern Christendom, and the conclusion is easy : the world has degenerated from the ideals of the Vedic hymns to the practices of the London slums. This was the method which missionary preachers pursued fifty years ago, only they turned it the other way round. They selected the most appalling instances of bestiality and cruelty they could find in pagan life and set them in contrast with the noblest specimens of self-sacrificing heroism they could find in Christian life ; and the demonstration of the infinite superiority of Christianity to paganism was accomplished.

There are three common fallacies in the philosophy of pessimism, three fundamental facts which it ignores.

I. It assumes that the world is at least

II. Pessimism sometimes compares the highest ideals of the past with the highest ideals of the present, sometimes compares the worst practices of the past with the worst practices of the present, and so reaches the conclusion that the world is stationary ; but oftener it compares the highest ideals of the past with the worst practices of the present, and reaches the conclusion that the world is retrograding. The only true comparison is between the average of the past with the average of the present. There is no modern dramatist superior to Shakespeare ; but there are a thousand to-day who read Shakespeare with delight to one who read him with delight in his own lifetime. Burglary and rape are no better now than they were in the age of which Scott wrote in "Ivanhoe." But the *Front de Bœuf* and the Knight Templar belonged to the nobility. Now such criminals hide in the dark corners of the earth and skulk along through its narrow and noisome alleys. It is not true that the oppression of the laborer in the modern factory is as horrible as the oppression of the slave seventy years ago on the sugar and cotton plantations in the Black Belt. But even if it were, the oppressed laborer now has an appeal for protection and redress which he did not then possess. Dr. Wallace's indictment of modern industrial conditions will be read alike by employer and employed. A similar indictment of slavery

¹Social Environment and Moral Progress. By Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace. Cassell & Co., New York.

seventy years ago would have been taboo alike to slave and slaveholder.

III. The Jewish and the Christian religion—for the two are one—was the first religion to teach men that God is the friend and physician of men, that he loves them in their ignorance, their superstition, their vice and crime, and that by his love, service, and sacrifice he seeks to deliver from their bondage to ignorance and sin all who are willing to accept his aid. And from that faith in a life-saving God has come an inspiration which has sent unnumbered thousands into hospitals, asylums, reform movements, missionary activities, social settlements, to carry succor to the suffering and the sinful. It is this curative quality in the Jewish and Christian religion which distinguishes it from all pagan religions. The ideals of moral character and conduct in Siddartha, Confucius, and Jesus may be, and in some respects are, analogous. But we would look in vain in the literature of Buddhism, Confucianism, Greek and Roman paganism, or Mohammedanism for a portraiture of God as a welcoming, helping, saving Father analogous to that portrayed by Jesus in the story of the Prodigal Son.

The world is growing better because each generation, though not each individual in each generation, graduates from life's school a little wiser, better, and stronger for its instruction and its discipline; because the average life of mankind is better than was the average life six thousand years ago; and because the inspirational faith in a helpful, companionable God is gradually penetrating the hearts and minds of men, and creating in them a spirit of love, service, and sacrifice which makes the present age pre-eminently a humanitarian age. And it is this last fact which will secure for Dr. Wallace's book a hearing it could not have secured three hundred years ago, and a serious consideration, though not an unqualified acceptance, of the four radical remedies which he proposes for present industrial ills:

The substitution of universal co-operation in lieu of universal competition.

The substitution of economic brotherhood in lieu of economic antagonism.

The substitution of freedom of access to land and capital for all in lieu of monopoly.

And, if we understand him aright, the abolition of individual inheritances and the substitution of universal inheritance by the State in trust for the whole community.