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‘A. R. Wallace, O.M., On Root Evils of Society.’

By Morrison Davidson.

Taking account of the various groups of undoubted facts (figures of infant mortality, alcoholism, suicide, &c.), many of which are so gross, so terrible that they cannot be overstated, it is not too much to say that our whole system of society is rotten from top to bottom, and the social environment as a whole, in relation to our possibilities and claim is the worst the world has ever seen. A. R. Wallace: *Social Environment and Moral Progress*.

“The worst social environment the world has ever seen!” And that, be it noted, is the deliberate testimony of an expert observer who has lived through three generations, with his rare faculties of perception unimpaired. And yet, strange to say, Dr. Wallace, in his outlook on the Cosmos, remains as incorrigible an optimist as ever he was, sixty or seventy years ago.

“O.M.”! Was ever order or degree more befitting? Even to be the contemporary of such a man is a distinction and a stimulus. In my mind somehow Alfred always tends to get mixed up with another Wallace, the deathless Knight of Elderslie—Sir William—Scotland’s hero.

Dr. Wallace’s new volume (Cassell, 3s. 6d) is really a challenge to the students, thinkers, and reformers of our day to inaugurate a new era of moral progress, to replace the fetid network of immoralities under which our alleged “Civilization” is so visibly perishing. The various forms of social immorality, which have accompanied our economic development, it is only too evident, constantly tend to increasing moral degradation and turpitude.

Why? Because in the domain of ethics there has been, from first to last, no progress at all commensurate with the amazing triumphs of mind over matter, even in the present generation. “Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers.” Nay, and worse still, “Man’s inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn,” now as then. As moral teachers, Socrates and Plato, the Buddha and Confucius, still hold the field:—

In the earliest records which have come down to us from the past, we find ample indications that general ethical conceptions, the accepted standard of morality and the conduct resulting therefrom, were in no degree inferior to those which prevail to-day, though in some respects they differed from ours. All these afford indications of intellectual and moral character quite equal to our own; while their lower manifestations, as shown by their wars and love of gambling, were no worse than corresponding immoralities to-day.

WAR AND GAMBLING.

In modern gambling Dr. Wallace pillories more especially Stock Exchange “operation” as immoral; but that, alas, we know, is not the code of “Sovereigns and Statesmen,” either in theory or practice. And as for wars and their cost, antiquity never could have conceived of such a monstrous *Bellum in Pace* as that from which Christian Britain now suffers. Last Census our population was 43,365,599. The Navy Votes for 1913-14 amount to £46,309,300 over £1 per head); while the Army Estimates aggregate £28,220,000, or together £74,500,000! And yet I can recall the time when the late G.O.M. was horrified at the prospect of a £100,000,000 Budget!

How, then is the new moral era to be initiated? The engines of economic development must simply be reversed; otherwise we shall presently find ourselves in a horrible *cul de sac* of “blood and iron.” Already a “Revolted Sex” is on the warpath with a crusade of fire, and there is no time to lose. For competition we must have co-operation; for economic strife in production and distribution we must have “mutual aid”—for immoral environment moral environment all round. But it is on the

FUTURE STATUS OF WOMANKIND

that Sage Alfred is at his best. Years ago he wrote (I forget where) these words of wisdom:—

To cleanse society of the unfit we must give to woman the power of selection in marriage, and the means by which this most desirable and important end can be attained will be brought about by giving her such training and education as shall render her economically independent.

“The Power of Selection in Marriage!”

Yes; that is the Open Sesame of the Cooperative Commonwealth. That is the true Female Suffrage, and until it is obtained by hook or by crook, Society never can be cleansed. Existing marriage is, at its best, but a pernicious “survival” of the Patriarchal Age, when, as in the Tenth Commandment, it was forbidden to “covet” the “wife” of the *paterfamilias*; or his “ox;” or his “ass;” or other “*thing*” owned by the domestic bully. Originally the wife ranked legally not as a person (*persona*), but as a thing (*res*), and the curse of property and the ferocious old *Patria Potestas* are upon her to this hour.

ENDOWMENT OF MOTHERHOOD.

Just recently a poor woman applied to Mr. Fordham, at the West London Police Court, for advice respecting her husband, who drank and stayed out late at night. After telling her that he could not help her, she expostulated: “I have a very unhappy life with him.” The Magistrate’s response was equally cynical and true: “I daresay. Many married women are miserable, and all women who are not married are miserable. I can’t help you.”

Neither could he; for not until woman is fully emancipated economically and motherhood is recognised as the grand normal occupation of the sex—to be suitably recompensed by the community at large, instead of practically depending, as hitherto, on the caprice of individual males—will it be possible to lay down any true basis of sexual morality. Nature has unmistakably made Woman the “Predominant Partner” in all that relates to the perpetuation of the Race, in spite of St. Paul’s musty patriarchal dogma making “man the head of the woman.” But when the Kingdom shall have come, the last will be found first and the first last. The Matriarchate will supersede the Patriarchate, and Woman and *her* Little Ones be, like our Old Age Pensioners, a sacrosanct first-charge on the resources of the entire community.

The Alfred Russel Wallace Page, Charles H. Smith, 2021.