

BAD TIMES.*

DR. ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE is better known to the public as one of our most distinguished naturalists than as an advanced social reformer. It is, however, in the latter capacity that he comes forward with the present essay, and endeavours to investigate the causes and discover the remedies for the prevailing depression. The chief conclusions at which he arrives are likely to meet with very limited assent; but it is undeniable that in the course of his essay there are many facts and arguments well worthy of consideration. Depression of trade he succinctly defines as "a widespread diminution in the demand for our chief manufactures both at home and abroad." The chief feature of the present depression is its length; for it has lasted uninterruptedly since 1874.

The causes generally alleged—namely, foreign protective duties, over-production, and the alteration in the value of gold and silver, Dr. Wallace shows to be incapable of explaining the wide and long-continued nature of the depression. For his own part, he calls attention to the enormous loans made by England to foreign Governments, which have been in great part badly applied, and have lessened, instead of increasing, the consumption of English goods abroad, the large increase of war expenditure since 1870, the increase in the extremes of wealth and poverty, speculation, adulteration, rural depopulation, and the agricultural depression—here he considers are the true sources of the evil. Agricultural depression he proposes to remedy by giving farmers fixity of tenure, and reducing the rents by 25 per cent.—the usual cost to the landlord of management and repairs, which the tenant could, and should, carry out himself at a very much smaller cost.

Rural depopulation Dr. Wallace would remedy by an extension of the system of allotments, and he adduces cases in which land under this system has

produced a much larger yield than when let out in farms. To be of any use, however, an allotment must be of some extent, and should adjoin the labourer's cottage, so that he may be able to work it in his spare hours, and not lose time in getting to it. The extremes to which Dr. Wallace would push the allotment system are expressed in the following extract:—

For Every Man His Own Plot of Ground.

Notwithstanding that the many and great advantages of allowing labourers to have land under fair conditions and on a permanent tenure have been pointed out and demonstrated many times over during the last fifty years, it is still so opposed to the customs and prejudices both of landlords and farmers, that the favourable examples of it in this country may almost be counted on the fingers. Yet the benefits to be derived from the practice are of such a truly national character that it is absolutely necessary to bring it into operation over the whole country, and this can only be done by legislation which will give all classes of Englishmen (for there is no reason why the privilege should be confined to manual labourers alone) the *right* to have a plot of land to be personally occupied, and the *power* to obtain it when and where desired, at a fair rent and on a secure tenure. And this can be done without any undue interference with vested interests if we will but make the oft-repeated maxim, that property has duties as well as rights, not a mere phrase but a reality; and, now that the safety and well-being of the whole nation are seen to require it, enforce their "duty" upon landlords and give the people "rights" which have long been in abeyance.

Doubtless the allotment system is capable of profitable extension; but we fear that "rights" of the nature described above are likely to lie on in the abeyance of which Dr. Wallace complains.

* Bad Times: an Essay on the Present Depression of Trade, Tracing It to Its Sources in Enormous Foreign Loans, Excessive War Expenditure, the Increase of Speculation and of Millionaires, and the Depopulation of the Rural Districts, with Suggested Remedies. By Alfred Russel Wallace, LL.D. Macmillan and Co. 2s. 6d.