

Social Environment and Moral Progress. By Alfred Russel Wallace.
Cassell & Company. New York. 1913. \$1.25 net.

The thesis of this little book may be briefly stated, and for the most part in the author's words. After citing many of the regrettable ills that attend present-day civilization, the late Mr. Wallace continues: "Taking account of these various groups of undoubted facts, 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 our claims, is the worst the world has ever seen." These ills are due, we are told, to universal competition, economic antagonism, monopoly, and inheritance by the few; and the remedies are, respectively, universal coöperation, economic brotherhood, freedom of access

to land and capital for all, and "inheritance by the state in trust for the whole community." Poverty must be abolished, the labor of the whole community organized by the government "for the equal good of all." Then will come a state of general felicity. "When men and women are, for the first time in the course of civilization, alike free to follow their best impulses; when idleness and vicious or hurtful luxury on the one hand, oppressive labor and the dread of starvation on the other, are alike unknown; when *all* receive the best and broadest education that the state of civilization and knowledge will admit; when the standard of public opinion is set by the wisest and the best among us, and that standard is systematically inculcated in the young; then we shall find that a system of *truly natural* selection will come spontaneously into action which will steadily tend to eliminate the lower, the less developed, or in any way defective types of men, and will thus continuously raise the physical, moral, and intellectual standard of the race."

Thus does the veteran evolutionist join hands with the makers of Utopias. The extracts given above sufficiently indicate the character of this book; they witness to the generous impulses of the author rather than to his competence in the field of the social sciences. Evidently the generosity and impulsiveness that characterized the Wallace of nearly six decades ago remained to attend the nonagenarian. The story of that former time is an old one, perhaps so old as to have been forgotten by those who have not had special occasion to know it; but it is worthy of being recalled wherever attention centres upon the character of either Darwin or Wallace.

During the Fifties the youthful naturalist was in the Malay Archipelago, and on one fateful occasion was shivering with fever in a native village. Eager and indefatigable, as always, he had seized the occasion to get at his reading, and had picked up the famous "Essay on Population" by Malthus. As he lay in his hammock and read, there occurred to him, as to Darwin twenty years before, when he, too, had chanced upon Malthus in an hour of illness, the illuminating idea of "the survival of the fittest." Wallace hastily developed the idea, using such evidence as he had; and then, casting about for a sponsor, hit upon Darwin as the most famous naturalist of the day. To him he sent his essay, requesting an opinion. This paper, embodying the main results of Darwin's twenty years of research and reflection upon the subject of species and their origin, came to the older scientist as a great blow. "I never saw a more striking coincidence," writes Darwin; "if Wallace had 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."

There ensued between the two men a contest for priority—not along the ordinary sordid lines, but in the sense that each insisted upon retiring in favor of the other. Friends intervened and forced the reluctant Darwin to present a sketch of his own results along with the paper of Wallace before the Linnean Society. Letters of Darwin at this time express disgust at himself because of his disappointment over being anticipated. "So all my originality," says Darwin to Lyell, "whatever it may amount to, will be smashed, though my book, if it will ever have any value, will not be deteriorated; as all the labor consists in the application of the theory." And again, to J. D. Hooker: "I always thought it very possible that I might be forestalled, but I fancied that I had a grand enough soul not to care; but I found myself mistaken and punished; I had, however, quite resigned myself, and had written half a letter to Wallace to give up all priority to him, and should certainly not have changed had it not been for Lyell's and your quite extraordinary kindness. . . . It is miserable in me to care at all about priority."

But the younger man was no less high-minded and generous than the older; he took the position at the time that the theory was Darwin's by reason of Darwin's long labors and reflections, and the completeness with which he had worked it out into details of application. He never wavered in this position, but used the term "Darwinism" and wrote a book under that title; as late as 1909, at the centenary of Darwin's birth and the semi-centenary of the "Origin of Species," he declared that Darwin's share in the theory of descent was to his as twenty years to one week. "Your modesty and candor," writes Darwin to Wallace, in 1870, "are very far from new to me. I hope it is a satisfaction to you to reflect—and very few things in my life have been more satisfactory to me—that we have never felt any jealousy towards each other, though in one sense rivals. I believe that I can say this of myself with truth, and I am absolutely sure that it is true of you."

The fact of it is that Wallace's contribution was in the nature of a "happy thought"; it would not have persuaded those "hodmen of science," as Huxley called them, who could not resist the array of evidence assembled by Darwin during two decades. The difference between the two men was temperamental. Darwin could never have written a book such as the one under review; he was slow and cautious, where Wallace was, and apparently remained, rather headlong. It would sometimes appear, in Darwin's letters to Wallace, that he sought to hold him in a little. Wallace has always been an easy writer, and a skillful expounder, and has at times been led by his own facility rather farther than cool judgment would admit. The book before us is a case in point.

There seems to be an inherent difficulty in the application of the theory of evolution to the life of human society. It may be due to the fact that such application is impossible; but the attempts hitherto made, including the one before us, have all suffered by reason of one of two conditions: where the author has been a natural scientist, he has lacked knowledge in the field of the social sciences; and where he has been a social scientist, he has generally understood evolution as some sort of a philosophical or metaphysical doctrine, generally confusing also the terms "evolution" and "progress." Darwin, in "The Descent of Man," and Spencer may stand as examples of these alternatives. The volume under review helps in no way towards the solution of the mode of social evolution, however vividly it may recall the deeds and the heroes of other days.

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