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[p. 7e]

‘Science and Socialism.’¹

A collection of well-written essays is generally acceptable, even though the reader find himself often at variance with the theories propounded. This will probably be the experience of most of those who examine the two volumes of “Studies, Scientific and Social,” collected by Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace. His manner is engaging, his penetrative and imaginative capacity for looking under the surface of things endows his work with suggestion and instruction, but his conclusions are not always convincing. For instance, if we accept his views on the migration of birds, we must adopt the theory that they have developed an irresistible hereditary impulse that, so far from promoting the survival of the race, tends in a disastrous degree towards its destruction. “There must,” he says, “be an enormous destruction of the young birds, which certainly amount in number to many times as many as the old ones, and it seems probable that this destruction takes place during the two annual migrations...Successful migration, except in the case of a small percentage, does not occur.” Again, in regard to the “homing instinct,” he will not admit a special sense of direction, though there have been many examples of horses, dogs, and cats finding their way under conditions that would have baffled human beings, and while he examines some of these he ignores the much more striking instance of the pigeon. But some of the articles on natural history which deal with such matters as protective disguises and geographical distribution, a subject treated with much lucidity, are decidedly entertaining and well-reasoned. It is when we enter the regions of political economy and sociology that the peculiarities of the author’s views become the most pronounced. His way of abolishing the National Debt at least has the merit of originality, viz., that “after a fixed date the Government will not allow transfers of stock (except in cases of inheritance), but will pay the dividends to the holders at that date for their lives and for the lives of any direct heirs living at the time they make their will or die, after which all payments will cease.” Somewhat familiar is the method of nationalising land in Ireland, which he proposes, “shall legally descend for three generations beyond the existing owner, and then pass to the State.” Many suggestions that form tempting subjects for thought will be found scattered over the book, and one of the best of these, we think, is the proposal for utilising the public credit for the construction of public works on the basis of an example provided by the island of Guernsey. “A market place was much wanted, and the Government of the island having determined to build it, issued notes, inscribed ‘Guernsey Market Notes’ for £1 each, and numbered from one to four thousand, £4,000 being the estimated cost of the market. With these notes the Government paid the contractor, the contractor paid his men, and the men bought all the necessaries they required, as the notes were a legal tender in the island...When the market was finished it immediately produced a revenue, and this revenue was applied to redeem the notes, and in ten years all were redeemed.” So Guernsey got its market place for nothing. Among the scientific subjects that the author has the faculty of explaining pleasantly to the general reader may be specially mentioned geology. Dr. Wallace is so very versatile that everyone who takes up the book may rely on finding something in it to engage his attention.

¹*Studies Scientific and Social.* By Alfred Russel Wallace. In two volumes. With Numerous Illustrations. London: Macmillan and Co. 18s.

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The Alfred Russel Wallace Page, Charles H. Smith, 2015.