

WALLACE ON DARWINISM.*

While Professor Wallace's book is a brilliant compendium of the *Origin of Species* and the *Descent of Man*, substantiated by the latest scientific discoveries, its chief interest lies in its calling attention to the ethical aspect, the seeming fatalism, of the doctrine of "natural selection" when applied to the destiny of man. Darwin, indeed, has been charged with building too large a theory on the slender foundation of observed varieties in domesticated animals and cultivated plants. This Wallace supplements by observation of the like among organisms in a state of nature: hence, these later studies are both more interesting and more convincing. But his argument touching the doctrine of the "struggle for existence" is the more deserving to be noted, because it deals with facts which underlie the existing social order; and the view we take of it must largely influence the way we meet the current social and even religious questions of the day. For, as Darwin has himself explained, it was by the reasonings of Malthus that his attention was first called to the inevitableness of that struggle; while many persons absolutely refuse to admit the validity of that argument at all, and shut their eyes to the facts on which it is claimed to rest, because it seems to them an attack upon the benevolence of God as shown in Creation.

In our remarks upon Professor Wallace's book we assume the general theory of evolution as proved, calling attention, however, to the modifications which he has put upon it. Darwin himself had spoken of the struggle for existence as "the doctrine of Malthus applied with manifold force to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms" (*Origin of Species*, chap. iii.); and his view had been contested by Agassiz, partly on the ground that it conflicted with his own faith in a benevolent Creator: it seemed, in short (to use his own language), "Malthus all over." The familiar and plausible doctrine of Malthus is that, while population obviously tends to increase in geometrical ratio,—that is, under precisely the same circumstances two millions will increase twice as much as one,—no possible increase in the production of food or other supplies (which we may suppose to be in arithmetical ratio) can permanently keep pace with it. This comparison of ratios, as Mr. Mill has said, is "an unlucky attempt to give pre-

* *Darwinism*. By A. R. Wallace. (London and New York: Macmillan.)

cision to things which do not admit of it, which every person capable of reasoning must see is wholly superfluous to the argument"; yet Mr. Mill fully accepts the conclusion to which it leads. Wallace, on the other hand, vigorously opposes the view of the universe here implied.

He meets it, indirectly, by what may yet prove to be an axiom: namely, that the tendency everywhere in nature is to give to animals "the maximum of life and the enjoyment of life, with the minimum of suffering and pain." The fact is, as he sufficiently shows, that Nature herself has set up insuperable barriers against the so greatly dreaded contingency. The sudden catastrophes that befall all creatures in their growth, catastrophes in which whole species are sometimes overwhelmed, show a tendency, if not an actual law, to prevent needless suffering from the crowding of gross numbers. Nay, what has usually been taken for horrible and agonizing pain among the lower animals is in reality nothing of the kind, but is a mere picture drawn by the sympathetic fancy. It is the apprehension of death as a dreaded crisis that gives man so much unnecessary pain; while with animals death is mostly unanticipated, immediate, and not lingering, so that their imagined agony is a preposterous conjecture, if not a sheer impossibility. Some must die, no doubt, in order that others may live; but the very "struggle for existence" by which this is brought about is at once an exercise of that healthy vigor which creates the keenest delight that any creature is capable of, and is itself one important factor in bringing about the variations that make so much of the joy and life of animal existence.

Again, as against Malthus and Darwin, Professor Wallace asserts that, "while the offspring always exceed the parents in numbers, generally to an enormous extent, *yet the total number of living organisms in the world does not and cannot increase year by year.* Consequently," he continues, "every year, on the average, as many die as are born, plants as well as animals; and the majority die premature deaths." This, to be sure, is no particular relief to the condition of things insisted on in Winwood Reade's *Martyrdom of Man*;* but it goes far to disprove the assertion that there is an *inevitable* tendency in the growth

* "It is useless to say that pain has its benevolence, that massacre has its mercy. Why is it so ordained that bad should be the raw material of good? Pain is not the less pain because it is conducive to development. There is blood upon the hand still, and all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten it."

of population to outgrow the means of its subsistence. To call poverty the failure of nature to meet the needs of an ever-increasing population is a gross caricature of the Creator's beneficence. The very opposite is the case: namely, that abundant provision is made for all the natural wants of the animal creation.

But we need not content ourselves with any such disputable postulate as this. What is it, after all, that makes man's life, as we actually know it, worth living? Surely not the mere ample supply of his natural wants, as of cattle in a stall. The struggle for existence in which he finds himself engaged is the only means we can even imagine to develop his life on a higher plane than mere animal content, and to create the opportunity of nobler satisfactions. As Professor Wallace shows, all the slow growths of our race struggling towards a higher life, all the agony of martyrs, all the groans of the victims of inhumanity, all the misery and unmerited suffering, all strivings for a better justice, all aspirations for the well-being of mankind, are so many steps in the direction of man's best attainment; nay, they are themselves a part of that very thing which makes his true destination upon earth.

But Professor Wallace goes further, to point out the inference which the religious mind is entitled to draw. Thus trained and strengthened by the conflict which is the ripening of its higher faculties, the soul of man is surely destined for an existence more noble and enduring than the life we see.

"That life is not as idle ore,
But iron dug from central gloom
And heated hot with burning fears,
And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
And battered with the shocks of doom,
To shape and use."

No philosophy of life can be more sound and rational than that "Optimism" which traces the Divine benevolence in the method of the universe, and dares affirm that "all things work together for good." Shakespeare flashes a light upon this matter, when he declares that

"there is nothing good or bad
But thinking makes it so."

All our thinking, it is true, does not alter the fact. "Things are what they are, and their consequences will be what they will be." It is a matter of small importance — excepting to our own peace

of mind — whether the order of the universe, which is to us a sort of fatality at any rate, fills us with gloom and despair, or with gladness and hope. But to that it is all-important. We are grateful to Professor Wallace for whatever help he offers us to a belief in that higher destination of our lives. And this faith, as we think, is of “one and the self-same spirit” with the effort which so many are making in our day for the coming of a kingdom of heaven among men, in which that doctrine of evolution, which some have found a message of despair, shall see its final earthly triumph.

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