

Transcription, January 2015:

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[p. 16d]

‘The Revolt of Democracy.’

(Cassell. 2s 6d.)

Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace is known chiefly as the naturalist who shares with Darwin the honour of contributing to modern science one of its great working hypotheses. But in his long and active life he has been a student in many other fields of research. He has always been deeply concerned with social problems, and now at the age of 90 he proves in this little book that his intellect remains as alert and his interests as practical as ever. Moreover, at an age when, if it is true that advancing years bring moderation of reforming zeal and revolutionary belief, Mr. Wallace should surely have a marked bias towards conservatism, he actually shows himself far in advance of the most sanguine of economic and social prophets. There is a certain piquancy in finding Mr. Wallace chiding his generation for having no plan by which to recreate society and abolish its age-long evils. He bids the Labour party take heart of grace. They want an immediate remedy for destitution. Let them adopt the suggestions which he here and now offers. First, he revives his old project of a free distribution of bread to all who ask for it. That is a preliminary, a temporary cure for starvation to be applied while the bases of industry are being reorganised. In the latter process the first step will be for the Government to raise the wages of all its employés above the minimum rate. The Government having become in this and other respects model employers will influence all other employers of labour: “by example and by operation of economic laws”; another step in the direction of peace and plenty will be “the local co-ordination of production and distribution,” which will effect enormous economies, chief among them the elimination of surplus crops or manufactured goods ascertained to be beyond local requirements, and the abolition of every form of advertisement, including the commercial traveller. Objections to these proposals are swept aside in very few words. Mr. Wallace is astonished that the Labour party were unaware that it is a fallacy to suppose that a general raising of wages will injure foreign trade. He absolutely denies that there is any necessary connection between wages and prices, “so that the former cannot be raised without the latter increasing also to an equal amount.”

A great deal of space would be required to discuss and answer the main propositions in Mr. Wallace’s social programme. They certainly prove him to be, as Mr. James Marchant in a most interesting introductory study of the author asserts that he is, an unfailing optimist.

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