
ALFRED RUSSELL WALLACE—HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

One of the most notable volumes of last year was the autobiography of Alfred Russel Wallace in two large octavo volumes. It is the record of a great intellectual life, and is published by Chapman and Hall, of London. Few men in this generation have achieved eminence in so many lines. Mr. Wallace is President of the Land Nationalization Society of Great Britain, and among the imposing array of vice presidents of that society are sixty-eight members of Parliament, a significant indication of the growth of the movement of "The Land for the People" among the English speaking race. He was the co-discoverer with Charles Darwin of the doctrine of evolution, if it be not an error to speak of the "discovery" of a theory more or less clearly pointed out by many notable thinkers from Lucretius to Goethe. His rank among naturalists is high and he is one of the leading anti-vaccinationists, an investigator into the phenomena of spiritualism, as well as one of the leading apostles of that faith. He is a man of exceptionally liberal learnings, and one whose published works, by reason of original discovery and hypothesis, must give him high rank among his scientific contemporaries—Darwin, Huxley, Tyndal, Spencer. And he has left a record of these achievements, of the intimate processes of his thought, of the distinguished men whose friend he was—all told in delightfully clear and direct English, from which we gain a knowledge of the man, and the finely simple character of his greatness.

In 1886 this representative thinker of his time—already an old man with silvered hair—stood upon one of our platforms and said a good word for Henry George, then our candidate for Mayor. He tells us that he failed to produce an impression upon his audience, but in this we think he is mistaken. Certainly, to those who knew of him and his great scientific achievements, his presence

on that platform, and his clear and explicit endorsement of the principles, if not of the method advocated—an endorsement which for courage was in refreshing contrast with the timidity of some others of our visitors from across the water—was inspiring.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the first volume—so far as it touches upon economic relations—is Wallace's attack upon Giffen's conclusions as to the improvement in the condition of the British working classes. He shows that many of these statistics which are devoted to showing such improvement in the last fifty years are illusory. He "slurs over and minimizes the universal increase in rent." It is pointed out too by Mr. Wallace in his examination of these statistics that the decreased cost of clothing is greatly discounted by the less enduring qualities of present day fabrics. Our author certainly indicates many of Giffen's shortcomings. Wallace rarely touches a controversial point that he does not enlighten.

The sanity of Wallace's reasoning is always an admirable quality of his work. Thus in rejecting the theory that attributes all to heredity and its opposite that attributes all to environment, he says with admirable discrimination:

"To my mind both factors necessarily enter into the determination of conduct, as well as into the development of character, and for the purposes of social life and happiness a partial determination, as developed and practised by Owen is the only safe guide to action, because over it alone have we almost complete control. Heredity, through which it is now known that ancestral characteristics are constantly reappearing, gives that infinite diversity of character which is the very salt of social life; by environment, including education we can so modify and improve that character as to bring it into harmony with the possessor's actual surroundings and thus fit him for performing some useful and enjoyable function in the great social organism." Elsewhere he says: "Owen contended and proved by a grand experiment* that environment greatly modifies character."

There are a few words in the first volume on Land Nationalization. After detailing the process by which masses of Englishmen have been disinherited from the soil—a process which he does not hesitate to characterize in correct terms—he says: "But all the robbery, all the spoliation, all the legal and illegal filching, have been on their (the landlords') side and they still hold the stolen property. *They* made laws to legalize their action, and some day we, the people, will make laws which will not only legalize but justify our process of restitution. It will justify it, because, unlike their laws, which always took from the poor to give to the rich—to the very class which made the laws—ours will take from the superfluity of the rich, not to give to the poor or to any individuals, but to so administer as to enable every man to live by honest work, to restore to the whole people their birthright in their native soil, and relieve all alike from a heavy burden of unnecessary and unjust taxation. This will be the true statesmanship of the future, and it will be justified alike by expediency, by ethics and by religion."

Wallace had been much impressed with *Progress and Poverty*, and had tried to induce his friend Charles Darwin to read it. Darwin wrote: "I will certainly order *Progress and Poverty*, for the subject is a most interesting one. But I read many years ago some books on political economy, they produced a disastrous effect on my mind, *viz*, utterly to distrust my own judgement on the subject, and to doubt much every one else's judgement. So I feel pretty sure that Mr. George's book will only leave my mind worse confounded than it is at present." Nothing further is related of Charles Darwin's impressions

* New Lanarck.

after reading the work. He was in ill health at the time—all his life long this patient and laborious investigator into nature's phenomena had been an invalid, and it is a marvel that he had accomplished so much. Had he been endowed with the splendid physique of Wallace it is conceivable that he would have rivalled his fellow naturalist in like profitable—to himself and posterity—excursions into many fields.

Wallace's correspondence with Herbert Spencer on the same subject is of even greater interest. Spencer writes: "As you may suppose, I fully sympathize with the aims of your proposed Land Nationalization Society, but for sundry reasons I hesitate to commit myself, at the present stage of the question, to a programme so definite as that which you send me." Spencer expressed himself too that there "ought to be generated a body of public opinion" before action was taken. This was a curious objection even at the time (1881) to one who had written Chapter IX of *Social Statics*. Certainly the objection possessed other characteristics than that of strangeness. It was a peculiarly feeble objection, since the object of the Society was the generation of just such a body of public opinion as Spencer declared necessary. Ten years later, when the Society had grown, and Progress and Poverty had sown additional seed, Mr. Spencer wrote in *Justice*: "A fuller consideration of the matter has led me to the conclusion that individual ownership, subject to State suzerainty, should be maintained." This Mr. Wallace rightly terms "a lame and impotent conclusion."

About the same time that Wallace had written to Spencer of the aims of the Land Nationalization Society he had addressed him in regard to Progress and Poverty. Spencer wrote that he had glanced at the book, and finding that he fundamentally disagreed with the writer, had not read more. He demurred to the supposition that the course of humanity could have been any different from what it had been, or that the distress through which it had passed could have been prevented. Upon this Wallace comments that he does not think that Henry George either stated or implied that the course of civilization "might have been different" from what it had been. "His whole work was devoted to showing the injustice and evils of private property in land as Herbert Spencer himself had done in *Social Statics*." It will be remembered that about this time the name of Herbert Spencer was being spoken of among land reformers who had not forgotten the teachings read by Wallace in 1853 on his return from the Amazon that had made, as he tells us, a powerful impression upon him, and led him to become, some years later, president of the Land Nationalization Society, now a quarter of a century old.

Yet Herbert Spencer will remain what Mr. Wallace calls him, "The first eminent English man of science to establish the doctrine of land nationalization on the firm basis of social Justice." And Mr. Wallace will occupy a higher moral elevation as a man of science less eminent than Spencer who possessed of great intellectual gifts, had the eye to perceive what Spencer saw and the courage to maintain steadfastly a truth which Spencer timidly and yieldingly renounced.

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