

## Reviews of Books

### A BIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF SOCIETY

Social Environment and Moral Progress. By Alfred Russel Wallace, O.M., D.C.L. Oxon., F.R.S., etc., author of *The Malay Archipelago*, *Darwinism*, *Man's Place in the Universe*, *The World of Life*, etc. Cassell & Co., New York. Pp. 181 (index). (\$1.25 net.)

THE opinions of a biologist on moral questions, on the contemporary social order as it stands, may be treated as the views of a specialist on matters outside his particular province or as logical deductions based on biological premises. If one approves Dr. Wallace's biological method one is likely to accept the book as a sample of coherent scientific reasoning. That biology has a direct bearing on ethics no one can gainsay. Biology has a very broad meaning, but if this meaning is to be narrowed so as to give special emphasis to the principles of natural and artificial selection the biological method becomes synonymous with a special mode of thought, which may not have been superseded, but has so far been modified and supplemented by later developments as to be no longer characteristic of the age. The "biological" tendency is then a convenient designation which may be used to differentiate a certain Victorian stage of thought from a later psychological stage, and Professor Pound has employed this distinction in his luminous essay on "Sociological Jurisprudence." The venerable author of these reflections, whose name will be linked with that of Darwin in the annals of biological discovery, is not too confidently to be assailed as old-fashioned, for he is neither a psychologist nor a sociologist, and it would not be hard to point to other exponents of a tradition

which is, as the saying is, still going strong. But the attitude is surely, none the less, to be classed as a nineteenth and not a twentieth century one. The cocksureness with which moral conclusions are stated is a bit surprising, but it was characteristic of the biological stage to put forward rather extravagant claims, and what seems opinionated and dogmatic now may have appeared rational and discreet not long ago. While a pessimistic survey of modern society would now have to be supported by evidence of more comprehensive character, we can well understand the satisfaction of the biologists with the adequacy of their narrow premises, just as we can understand how the contemporary craze for "eugenics," the latest phase of the principle of artificial selection, has come about as the result of their influence.

The strictures of Dr. Wallace on contemporary society, regarded particularly in its moral and legal aspects, hardly call for detailed examination. Much of what he says may be true, much is merely matter of personal prejudice. That science alone can dissipate prejudice is illustrated by the faults not less forcefully than by the merits of this book. The law reformer and the criminologist are not less active than the eugenicist in the work of amelioration, but Dr. Wallace seems to overlook this.

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