A PROPHET IN JUDGMENT.

It is not chiefly the large store of experience that constitutes the wisdom of old age. It is more a certain clearness and simplicity of understanding that comes with the decline of the bodily passions and with the necessary withdrawal from the battle of life. After a long and arduous experience, in which all the powers of the human spirit have been bent on ordering the affairs of man or on enlarging the bounds of knowledge, there sometimes comes a lucid interval of later years, in which a spiritual settlement takes place, the bewildering complexity of things giving way before the few issues of supreme import. In a mass of broad humanity, such issues are always definitely moral issues, rooted deeply in the destiny of man. Such men have always been the prophets and the soothsayers, and people have always done well to listen to them. It follows from the nature of the case that the thoughts they utter are more truly revolutionary than anything that comes from the wilder and more heated blood of the younger generation. For the notion that old age tends to conservatism is only true of those who have spent their lives in narrow processes of self-seeking, or when the collapse of physical and mental powers brings extreme personal timidity. The grey spirit of such men as Tolstoy, Björnson, or Alfred Russel Wallace becomes bolder and more adventurous as it passes beyond the normal limits of life.

Dr. Wallace, for over half a century one of our foremost thinkers and fighters, celebrates
of the propertied classes, and that will be exceedingly unsafe.

So, slowly, the intrinsic logic of the situation unfolds itself. It is a long and slow process that poverty can be mitigated and reduced by concessions which leave virtually unimpaired the fortresses of property and power, the social will is ripe for such reforms. But as soon as it becomes manifest that "the poverty at one end of the social scale will not be removed except by encroaching heavily upon the great riches at the other," workers, from the meeting-rooms of London to the cornfields of the United States, will begin to hear much about the wickedness of advocating a class war, of the underlying harmony of interests between Capital and Labor, and of the perils of State interference with the delicate springs of industry.

What havoc does Dr. Wallace make of all this pleasing sophistry of business-men, politicians, and political economists! Of course, the abolition of poverty involves an attack upon misgotten and ill-used property, and upon the life of luxury and idleness which comes from the possession of unearned wealth. Unless the fortresses of legalized plunder are courageously assailed and taken, all talk of effective social reform is idle. More and more the State must be the instrument of such reforms, and the financial resources it needs must be taken from the treasure-houses of the rich.

"Justice and public policy alike demand that every penny of taxation should be taken from the superfluously rich at or near the other end of the scale. Thus, and thus only, could we cause the present insignificant minimum wage to rise, first above the bare subsistence rate, and then by a steady increase to an amount sufficient to procure for all our workers the full and complete existence which science and the human will place within its grasp. Only by such means can the economic and moral cleavage of classes disappear. This cleavage is itself the product of the system of 'impropriety,' by which riches and poverty arise, and the moral sentiments which have gathered round it are still the chief obstacles to the rise of an effective social will to abolish poverty.

It is this widespread belief in there being a 'lower class' among us—hewers of wood and drawers of water—whose intrinsic worth as human beings is assessed by the small wages they receive, that causes the proposals to raise their earnings to what we now term 'a living wage' to be widely resisted, as if it were something dangerous, unnecessary, or even immoral."

Only very slowly, in such a land as this, does the will of the people rise against the blasphemy of this valuation, and insist upon the right to live like human beings on the fruits of their labor, on the intrinsic worth of human life. But Dr. Wallace ends upon a note of hope, not of despair. The principle of competition as a guide of economic life has absolutely broken down. The time is past when we can stand and prosper in the struggle towards civilization. For a people having the power to abolish poverty, and knowing that it has the power, to refuse to use that power, is to acquiesce in its own degradation, the unpardonable sin. But Dr. Wallace, in the words of the President's message, has already come when the workers have power and confidence enough to demand that a Government which carries the corporate strength and intelligence of the nation, shall "abolish starvation in this land of superfluous wealth." "This must be the great and noble work of our statesmen of to-day and of to-morrow. May they prove themselves equal to the great opportunity which the justifiable revolt of labor has now afforded them!"