

**SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AND MORAL PROGRESS.** By Alfred Russel Wallace, F.R.S. New York: The Cassell Co. \$1.25.

Alfred Russel Wallace will ever be associated with Charles Darwin as the author of the *Theory of Natural Selection*. And now, at ninety years of age, this venerable scientist has written a little sociological manual full of vision and moral hope, in which he makes an urgent demand for the spiritual invigoration of civilized life. How is such a profound and collective realization of moral principles to be directed? "*No definite advance in morals can occur in any race unless there is some selective or segregative agency at work.*" Where are we to look for such an agency? Before attempting to answer this last and vitally important question, he addresses himself to a consideration of the facts of historic and contemporary life. He asserts, in the face of a prevalent and shallow optimism, a few of the facts of human nature which Catholics have always and everywhere believed. There is no necessary connection, he believes, between the lapse of ages and the improve-

ment of the human race. Indeed there is a tendency to degeneration or recession directly an individual or a society abstains from conscious moral or intellectual effort; there is, in fact, a general weakness inherent in human nature which prevents automatic progress towards what is best. He holds that intellectual and moral genius is rare and infrequent, because the higher intellectual and moral powers are so rarely of a life-preserving value. May we not argue from this that they are given us for ends which transcend the needs of this present life, and are only intended to reach their fullest development and use in the life which is to come?

He also holds that "there has been no definite advance of morality from age to age, and even that the lowest races, at each period, possessed the same intellectual and moral nature as the higher." There have been risings and fallings, periods and places of improvement or decay; individuals in all ages of astonishing virtues or vices; now one and now another nation sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, now one and now another finding a precarious place in the sun. Coming to our own time, he points out how mechanical invention has enabled man to ransack the treasures of the world, and to produce an unprecedented accumulation of wealth. But with what results? "This rapid growth of wealth, and increase of our power over Nature, put too great a strain upon our crude civilization and our superficial Christianity, and it was accompanied by various forms of social immorality. . . . amazing and unprecedented." In the five following chapters he gives details of this social immorality, and sums up with the verdict that we are "*guilty of a lack of national morality that has never been surpassed in any former age.*"

What is to be done? The remaining chapters of the book provide a basis of solution conceived on spiritual and scientific lines. Dr. Russel Wallace at first is careful to explain exactly what the *Theory of Natural Selection* really is and what it is not where it holds good and where it ceases to apply. As applied to the brute world it rests upon two facts: (1) the great *variability* in all common and widespread species, and (2) their *enormous power of increase*. The great variability in these animal species allows the strongest of their number to adapt themselves gradually to the environment in which they are placed, while their enormous power of increase enables these same stronger members of each species to survive, while the weaker ones die out. In this way it happens that only the fittest survive. Now this process of Natural Selec-

tion obtains throughout the whole brute creation, and there is no other process at work there sufficiently powerful to check or supersede it. *But with man the case is entirely different.* The mistake of many eminent scientists, and of most popular scientific writers in the past, and even in the present generation, has been to apply the theory of Natural Selection to man without stopping to inquire how its action has been checked and even superseded when applied to human life. There is an absolute distinction between brute life and human life, says Dr. Russel Wallace, *a distinction which Natural Selection, as the basis of the evolutionary theory, can never account for.*

Man, according to Dr. Wallace, is possessed of a lofty intellect, and

besides this lofty intellect is gifted with what we term a moral sense: insistent perception of justice and injustice, of right and wrong, of order and beauty and truth, which as a whole constitute his moral and æsthetic nature. . . . . The long course of human history leads us to the conclusion that this higher nature of man arose at some far distant epoch. . . . . at a time when by the influx of some portion of the spirit of Deity man became a "living soul."

What change, then, asks the author, has this higher nature of man produced in the action of the laws of variation and Natural Selection? A detailed answer to this question is given which may be summed up in the final conclusion, that in the realm of human nature Natural Selection has been very largely superseded by a higher form of selection based on the Christian law of life. The "survival of the fittest" gives place to "mutual aid." We select for moral and mental and not merely for physical qualities, and the highest of the former may co-exist with the lowest of the latter. But there are many who in theory or fact repudiate this higher Christian law,

who are so imbued with the universality of Natural Selection as a beneficial law of Nature that they object to our interference with its action in, as they urge, the elimination of the unfit by disease and death, even when such diseases are caused by the insanitary conditions of our modern cities, or the misery and destitution due to our immoral and irrational social system. Such writers entirely ignore the undoubted fact that affection, sympathy, compassion form as essential a part of human nature as do the higher intellectual and moral faculties; that in the very earliest periods of history, and among the lowest of exist-

ing savages, they are fully manifested, not merely between members of the same family, but throughout the whole tribe, and also in most cases to every stranger who is not a known or imagined enemy.

The last part of this valuable little book is to my mind the least conclusive. From the outset, it will be remembered the author demanded "some selective or segregative agency" of a high moral order to raise the standard of spiritual theory and practice throughout the civilized world. He suggests that given economic equality between man and woman, family life may provide such an agency. But may we not ask him what spiritual agency will he provide to sweeten and elevate the family before it can achieve its high and proper moral mission to the world? Has God, Who made man a living soul, forgotten to provide an environment, an atmosphere, a standard and a city, visible to all the world, where man may freely choose to live and lead the higher life?

Urbs Jerusalem beata,  
Dicta pacis visio  
Nova veniens e coelo  
Nuptiali thalamo  
Plateae et muri ejus  
Ex auro purissimo.