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'Social Diseases and Worse Remedies.'

"Social Environment and Moral Progress." By Alfred Russel Wallace. (London: Cassell and Co.) 3s. 6d. net.

[Published To-Day.] Our first word is one of hearty congratulation that Dr. Wallace, at an age when he might reasonably lay the weary pen aside, has the spirit and energy to write a volume that must rank as one of his most thought-stirring productions. At the end of ninety years his sense of social evils is as intense as that of a young Crusader, and while one may not accept his remedies, one can congratulate him on his assault on some of the most terrible and perplexing problems of to-day. His text runs on these lines: "It is not too much to say that our whole system of society is rotten from top to bottom, and the social environment as a whole, in relation to our possibilities and our claims, is the worst that the world has ever seen." There is much painful evidence in support of the proposition, and whether we adopt the Socialistic remedy or not—Dr. Wallace would have us do so—we must admit that in many respects the state of society is not one to engender pride.

Wealth has undoubtedly increased a hundredfold during the last century, but under conditions which permitted children to be taken from the workhouses to slave in the mills; which compelled girls to work in an empoisoned environment that produced horrible and painful diseases; which still condemns thousands to struggle on the verge of starvation, and more people to die annually of want than are killed in a great war. Huge cities have grown up filled with insanitary slums; our capitalist system is a vast and pernicious system of gambling; and "justice," as we call it, goes to the man with the longest purse. The ordinary man might be reduced to despair; Dr. Wallace sees in these conditions the fery cross calling him to a new campaign.

We cannot admit that his remedy will find universal acceptance. The evil is caused, in the first place, he considers, by universal competition, for which he would substitute "universal co-operation"; for economic antagonism he would have "economic brotherhood, as of a great family of friends"; monopoly he would abolish, and have freedom of access to land and capital instead; and in place of allowing a few in each generation to inherit the stored-up wealth of the preceding generation, while the many inherit nothing, he would adopt the principle of equality of opportunity for all, or of universal inheritance by the State in trust for the whole community. Plainly these remedies are utopian, and as such impracticable. One may desire as fervently as Dr. Wallace that the Government should organize the labour of the whole community for the equal good of all, and take steps to abolish death by starvation and by preventable disease—but the great question is "How?" What is the "whole community," and what is the "equal good of all"? Experiments on these lines have been failures in the past, and is there any hope that any government of to-day would be more successful? There may be and are "social diseases," but as was pointed out by Huxley, Dr. Wallace's great compeer, there are such things as "worse remedies."

G. E.