

## ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE.

Great in years and in fame, Alfred Russel Wallace—his head bleached with the sun of ninety-one summers—still works with the zest of youth among us. Almost he seems as if grown into immortality without suffering the appointed change. The last of the great Victorians to bear us company in this century, he stands, but slightly bent by his epoch-span of toil, the superbest example of intellectual vitality of modern days. Among the illustrious men of history only the painter Titian, and Hippocrates, Democratus, and Zeno, the Greek philosophers, have exceeded him in length of active mental life. Great as a scientific investigator, great as a social reformer, he belongs by virtue of the loftiness of his aim in the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, and the noble simplicity of his character, to the order of seers and law-givers of the epic days in the world's history. Yet is he as intensely of our twentieth century as the youngest and most eclectic of our generation. He accepts eagerly every new invention, every fresh scientific discovery, every movement of the people towards freedom and social betterment. *The Daily Citizen*, the *Labour Leader*, the *Clarion*, and other Socialist papers have their place in his study, together with scientific journals and books from all

lands; and the news of Parliament, of strikes, of all that pertains to the present-day weal or woe of people, and the hopes of the future, interest him as keenly as did the reports of the Corn Law and Chartist agitations and of the revolutionary uprisings in France and Germany some seventy years ago.

Great is he also as a heretic: as the deliverers of mankind must be. A Socialist, a believer in God (when belief in God is become scientifically unorthodox), a spiritualist, an anti-vivisectionist, an anti-vaccinationist, an anti-militarist, he is thus the very antithesis of his only living compeer in Darwinian fame, Ernest Haeckel, who is an anti-Socialist, an atheist, a materialist, a vivisectionist, a vaccinationist, and a militarist. With the example of two such supreme scientific protagonists before us, each with minds expanded and disciplined with over four score years' experience and reflection, differing as they do so widely in their conclusions concerning the facts and mysteries of life—surely the rest of us, younger and immeasurably less informed, may well abstain from dogmatism in putting forward our particular beliefs!

#### HIS LATEST BOOK.

The advent of another volume fresh from the pen of the illustrious naturalist and reformer in his ninety-first year, is itself a memorable circumstance. Few must be the books written at so advanced a period of life which the world is likely to see during the next thousand years, unless, indeed, Metchinkoff's prediction of a general prolongation of life as the result of improved hygienic habits is realised. But Dr. Wallace's new book, *Social Environment and Moral Progress* (Cassell and Company, 6s. net), is remarkable not merely as the product of his wonderful old age, but as one of the most deeply interesting and important restatements of Darwinism as applied to the problems of human progress that has yet been written. Its thesis is a

tremendously challenging one. It constitutes, in fact, the boldest justification of Socialism that could be put forth from a biological standpoint. Already in his *Wonderful Century*, *Man and the Universe*, *The World of Life*, as well as in several of his earlier works, the main ideas of it have been set forth, but in the present volume they are welded together into a comprehensive plea for Socialism. He proclaims the inflexibility of the Darwinian law of natural selection in the physical evolution of man, but contends that the operation of that law in human life has been modified since man became endowed with mind and so became master of his environment. Since then there has not been, nor can there henceforth be, any material change in man's bodily structure: there can only be intellectual and moral change, and that only on condition that we change our social conditions so as to bring into play moral selective variations.

Intellectually and morally man has, Dr. Wallace thinks, made little or no progress for thousands of years. In point of high ethical conception, as witness the teaching of the great Indian epic, the Maha-Bharata (1500 B.C.), the Vedic hymns, Socrates, Confucius, and Buddha, the ancient civilised minds were in advance rather than behind the moral teachers of our day. In the matter of intelligence and genius, he believes that the ancients were, perhaps, more highly gifted than we. The idea that our mental faculties have increased in power is totally unfounded. "We are," he points out, "the inheritors of the accumulated knowledge of all the ages; and it is quite possible, and even probable, that the earliest steps taken in the accumulation of this vast mental treasury required even more thought and a higher intellectual power than any of those taken in our own era." How, then, are we to account for this cessation of moral and intellectual progress? He accounts for it by the fact that the essential characters of man, intellectual, moral, and emotional, are inherent in him from birth, that they are

subject to great variation from individual to individual, and that they can be modified by education and social influences, but that these latter changes are not hereditary and are consequently not permanent. It follows, "therefore, that no definite advance in mind or morals can ever occur in any race unless there is some selective or segregative agency at work."

HIS TESTAMENT: SOCIALISM, THE ONLY HOPE OF HUMAN PROGRESS.

Here Dr. Wallace and the Eugenists meet on the same platform, but only to part company forthwith. The Eugenists believe that the only hope of further progress lies in artificial agencies of selection: Dr. Wallace relies wholly on setting free the agencies of natural selection by the abolition of social inequality, and by elevating the entire social environment of the race. He proceeds to arraign in the strongest Socialist terms our whole industrial system, and sums up in the following tremendous indictment:—

*Taking account of these various groups of undoubted facts, many of which are so gross, so terrible, that they cannot be overstated, 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.*

But his Socialist hope is no less abounding: and we quote one or two of his prophetic passages:—

It is my firm conviction that when we have cleansed the Augean stable of our present social organisation, and have made such arrangements that all shall contribute their share either of physical or mental labour, and every one shall obtain the full and equal reward for their work, the future progress of the race will be rendered certain by the fuller development of its higher nature acted on by a special form of selection which will then come into play.

It may be taken as certain that when women are economically and socially free to choose, numbers of the worst men among all classes who now readily obtain wives *will be universally rejected.*

The survival of the fittest is really the extinction of the unfit; and it is the one brilliant ray of hope for humanity that, just as we advance in the reform of our cruel and disastrous social system, we shall set free a power of selection in marriage that will steadily and certainly improve the character as well as the strength and beauty of our race.

Such is the Socialist testament which the great and venerable evolutionist, from his little home down in Dorset, sends forth to the world in the splendid youth of his ninety-first year. We have not given prominence to his special mystical theory of the "spiritual influx" which he believes is the essence of man's humanity: he will, we hope, forgive us our scepticism—which is acquired, not inherited! But we shall venture to express to him, on behalf of the world-wide Socialist movement, our gratitude for his great scientific work, his valiant championship of our Socialist cause, and the length of days amongst us that have enabled him to endow us with his latest book as a sword and shield in our battle for the commonweal.