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[p. 4d]

### ‘Abolition of Poverty.’

Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, now ninety years of age, has assiduously devoted himself of late to the advocacy of Socialism. Many will be unable to repress a feeling of disappointment that this great man, whose name will always be linked with that of Charles Darwin, should not have found a more practical mission to which to dedicate the closing years of a long and useful life. In his latest book, “The Revolt of Democracy,” Dr. Wallace gives expression to views and aims that are illusory and impracticable, and but for his world-wide reputation would excite no interest, and certainly no public comment. The abolition of poverty is his supreme object, and as a means to that end he proposes the distribution of free bread by the local authorities to anyone who may make application, no questions being asked. He also insists upon the establishment of “a very high minimum wage” for “really necessary or useful work,” and he favours the entire relief of the working classes from the burden of taxation. He would exact from those possessed of “superfluous wealth” all that is necessary for the support of the State, increasing the death duties and land taxes, and giving the option of paying these in land instead of money. Having secured the land, Dr. Wallace would place upon it the unemployed, who would receive every assistance from the State.

There are other proposals in this remarkable book, but these indicate the lines on which this thinker, now a convert to Socialism, would proceed. The effect of his proposals is obvious. The establishment of a high minimum wage would involve the almost immediate cessation of thousands of industrial concerns now yielding only a moderate profit. No Government can compel employers to conduct business at a loss. Dr. Wallace does not calculate upon the vast addition to the unemployed inevitably caused by widespread commercial and industrial stagnation. He makes provision—after a fashion—for the present percentage of unemployed, but he cannot surely propose to place upon the land the many thousands of additional workers thrown idle by the bankruptcy of employers. Dr. Wallace is at variance with every political economist in suggesting that the vast majority of the electors who practically dictate the national policy should not be called upon to contribute a penny toward the expenditure which that policy might entail. Were that suggestion to be adopted the most extravagant and wasteful administration that any country has ever known would certainly be inaugurated.

Where the quotations happen to suit his purpose, Dr. Wallace cites passages from John Stuart Mill’s work, “The Principles of Political Economy,” and apparently he remains comfortably oblivious of the fact that Mill would have emphatically condemned the notion of relieving any class of citizens from the obligation of paying taxes. That the distribution of free bread without inquiry would lead to abuse Dr. Wallace does not deny, but he airily dismisses that objection with the remark, “Even if it must be so, better give bread to a hundred loafers than refuse it to a hundred others who are starving.” The conclusion is irresistible, that this great thinker who has commanded the admiration of his countrymen has permitted his judgment to be perverted by sentiment. Dr. Russel Wallace’s adherence to the cause of Socialism is to be regretted, and not even the influence of his name should blind us to the fact that the adoption of his proposals, instead of abolishing poverty, would aggravate that evil.

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*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2015.