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[p. 1c]

‘The Submerged Worker.’

“The Revolt of Democracy.” By Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace. 2s. 6d. net. Cassell and Co.

Competitive commerce, red in tooth and claw, is the text of Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace’s book, “The Revolt of Democracy.”

Sweating, unemployment, low wages, unhealthy trades, bad and overcrowded dwellings, rural depopulation; these blots on our industrial system are carefully and exhaustively dealt with by this most earnest social reformer.

Inquiries into these evils have succeeded each other in a melancholy procession during the last 60 years. More or less ineffective remedies have been suggested from time to time and these again, says Dr. Wallace, have been followed by even less effective legislation when any palliative has been attempted. “During the whole of the nineteenth century there was a continuous advance in the application of labour-saving machinery; and our wealth has increased to an equally marvellous extent.” Yet, says the author, the result has been to create a limited upper class, while a fourth of our whole population exists in a state of fluctuating penury--often sinking below what has been called the “margin of poverty.” “Of these many thousands are annually drawn into the gulf of absolute destitution, dying either from direct starvation, or from diseases produced by their employment.” The workers themselves, during this period when wealth and want were increasing side by side, had not visualised the fundamental causes of this terrible social disease--land monopoly and the competitive system of industry.

Until quite recently it was believed that the abolition of poverty was entirely outside the true sphere of Governmental action. It was accepted as a truism that poverty was due to economic causes over which the Legislature had no control; that wages were kept down by the iron law of supply and demand. “It was, I believe, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman who changed this attitude of negation of all his predecessors. He held it to be the duty of a Government . . . so to legislate as to make our native soil more and more a treasurehouse for the poor, rather than a mere pleasurehouse for the rich.” As an earnest of his purpose he brought into his Ministry Mr. John Burns and Mr. Lloyd George. Followed old age pensions and other far-reaching measures for the benefit of the working classes. “It is, in my opinion, largely due to this attitude of Liberal Government, without adequate remedial legislation, with a corresponding change in public opinion, that has led to the recent effort of the workers to bring about better conditions by means of combined strikes.” When the organisation of the trade unions is rendered more complete, says Dr. Wallace, and when the accumulated funds of a dozen or 20 years are devoted to this one purpose, the bulk of the inhabitants of London could be made to suffer a famine comparable with a besieged town. Such a disaster can be prevented by improving the social status of the industrial and other workers. In Dr. Wallace’s absorbing treatment of the great problem, he deals with wages, unemployment, co-ordinated labour, foreign trade. “The Revolt of Democracy” is a book for the social reformer’s pocket, and it might be studied with profit by both employer and employe.

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*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2020.

