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THE WONDERFUL CENTURY.\*

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EVERY naturalist has in his heart a warm affection for the author of the Malay Archipelago, and is glad to acknowledge with gratitude his debt to this great explorer and thinker and teacher who gave us the law of natural selection independently of Darwin. When the history of our century is written, the foremost place among those who have guided the thought of their generation and opened new fields for discovery will assuredly be given to Wallace and Darwin.

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\* Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1899.

Few of the great men who have helped to make our century memorable in the history of thought are witnesses of its end, and all who have profited by the labors of Wallace will rejoice that he has been permitted to stand on the threshold of a new century, and, reviewing the past, to give us his impressions of the wonderful century.

We men of the nineteenth century, he says, have not been slow to praise it. The wise and the foolish, the learned and the unlearned, the poet and the pressman, the rich and the poor, alike swell the chorus of admiration for the marvelous inventions and discoveries of our own age, and especially for those innumerable applications of science which now form part of our daily life, and which remind us every hour of our immense superiority over our comparatively ignorant forefathers.

Our century, he tells us, has been characterized by a marvelous and altogether unprecedented progress in the knowledge of the universe and of its complex forces, and also in the application of that knowledge to an infinite variety of purposes calculated, if properly utilized, to supply all the wants of every human being and to add greatly to the comforts, the enjoyments, and the refinements of life. The bounds of human knowledge have been so far extended that new vistas have opened to us in nearly all directions where it had been thought that we could never penetrate, and the more we learn the more we seem capable of learning in the ever-widening expanse of the universe. It may, he says, be truly said of the men of science that they have become as gods knowing good and evil, since they have been able not only to utilize the most recondite powers of Nature in their service, but have in many cases been able to discover the sources of much of the evil that afflicts humanity, to abolish pain, to lengthen life, and to add immensely to the intellectual as well as the physical enjoyments of our race.

In order to get any adequate measure for comparison with the nineteenth century we must take not any preceding century, but the whole preceding epoch of human history. We must take into consideration not only the changes effected in science, in the arts, in the possibilities of human intercourse, and in the extension of our knowledge both of the earth and of the whole visible universe, but the means our century has furnished for future advancement.

Our author, who has borne such a distinguished part in the intellectual progress of our century, shows clearly that in means for the discovery of truth, for the extension of our control over Nature, and for the alleviation of the ills that beset mankind, the inheritance of the twentieth century from the nineteenth will be

greater than our own inheritance from all the centuries that have gone before.

Some may regret that, while only one third of Wallace's book is devoted to the successes of the wonderful century, the author finds the remaining two thirds none too much for the enumeration of some of its most notable failures; but it is natural for one who has borne his own distinguished part in all this marvelous progress to ask where the century has fallen short of the enthusiastic hopes of its leaders, what that it might have done it has failed to do, and what lies ready at the hand of the workers who will begin the new century with this rich inheritance of new thoughts, new methods, and new resources.

The more we realize the vast possibilities of human welfare which science has given us the more, he says, must we recognize our total failure to make any adequate use of them.

Along with this continuous progress in science, in the arts, and in wealth-production, which has dazzled our imaginations to such an extent that we can hardly admit the possibility of any serious evils having accompanied or been caused by it, there has, he says, been many serious failures—intellectual, social, and moral. Some of our great thinkers, he says, have been so impressed by the terrible nature of these failures that they have doubted whether the final result of the work of the century has any balance of good over evil, of happiness over misery, for mankind at large.

Wallace is no pessimist, but one who believes that the first step in retrieving our failures is to perceive clearly where we have failed, for he says there can be no doubt of the magnitude of the evils that have grown up or persisted in the midst of all our triumphs over natural forces and our unprecedented growth in wealth and luxury, and he holds it not the least important part of his work to call attention to some of these failures.

With ample knowledge of the sources of health, we allow and even compel the bulk of our population to live and work under conditions which greatly shorten life. In our mad race for wealth we have made gold more sacred than human life; we have made life so hard for many that suicide and insanity and crime are alike increasing. The struggle for wealth has been accompanied by a reckless destruction of the stored-up products of Nature, which is even more deplorable because irretrievable. Not only have forest growths of many hundred years been cleared away, often with disastrous consequences, but the whole of the mineral treasures of the earth's surface, the slow productions of long-past eras of time and geological change, have been and are still being exhausted with reckless disregard of our duties to posterity and solely in the in-

terest of landlords and capitalists. With all our labor-saving machinery and all our command over the forces of Nature, the struggle for existence has become more fierce than ever before, and year by year an ever-increasing proportion of our people sink into paupers' graves.

When the brightness of future ages shall have dimmed the glamour of our material progress he says that the judgment of history will surely be that our ethical standard was low and that we were unworthy to possess the great and beneficent powers that science had placed in our hands, for, instead of devoting the highest powers of our greatest men to remedy these evils, we see the governments of the most advanced nations arming their people to the teeth and expending most of the wealth and all the resources of their science in preparation for the destruction of life, of property, and of happiness.

He reminds us that the first International Exhibition, in 1851, fostered the hope that men would soon perceive that peace and commercial intercourse are essential to national well-being. Poets and statesmen joined in hailing the dawn of an era of peaceful industry, and exposition following exposition taught the nations how much they have to learn from each other and how much to give to each other for the benefit and happiness of all.

Dueling, which had long prevailed, in spite of its absurdity and harmfulness, as a means of settling disputes, was practically abolished by the general diffusion of a spirit of intolerance of private war; and as the same public opinion which condemns it should, if consistent, also condemn war between nations, many thought they perceived the dawn of a wiser policy between nations.

Yet so far are we from progress toward its abolition that the latter half of the century has witnessed not the decay, but a revival of the war spirit, and at its end we find all nations loaded with the burden of increasing armies and navies.

The armies are continually being equipped with new and more deadly weapons at a cost which strains the resources of even the most wealthy nations and impoverishes the mass of the people by increasing burdens of debt and taxation, and all this as a means of settling disputes which have no sufficient cause and no relation whatever to the well-being of the communities which engage in them.

The evils of war do not cease with the awful loss of life and destruction of property which are their immediate results, since they form the excuse for inordinate increase of armaments—an increase which has been intensified by the application to war purposes of those mechanical inventions and scientific discoveries which.

properly used, should bring peace and plenty to all, but which when seized upon by the spirit of militarism directly lead to enmity among nations and to the misery of the people.

The first steps in this military development were the adoption of a new rifle by the Prussian army in 1846, the application of steam to ships of war in 1840, and the use of armor for battle ships in 1859. The remainder of the century has witnessed a mad race between the nations to increase the death-dealing power of their weapons and to add to the number and efficiency of their armies, while all the resources of modern science have been utilized in order to add to the destructive power of cannon and both the defensive and the offensive power of ships. The inability of industrious laboring men to gain any due share of the benefits of our progress in scientific knowledge is due, beyond everything else, to the expense of withdrawing great armies of men in the prime of life from productive labor, joined to the burden of feeding and clothing them and of keeping weapons and ammunition, ships, and fortifications in a state of readiness, of continually renewing stores of all kinds, of pensions, and of all the laboring men who must, besides making good the destruction caused by war, be withdrawn from productive labor and be supported by others that they may support the army.

And what a horrible mockery is this when viewed in the light of either Christianity or advancing civilization! All the nations armed to the teeth and watching stealthily for some occasion to use their vast armaments for their own aggrandizement and for the injury of their neighbors are Christian nations, but their Christian governments do not exist for the good of the governed, still less for the good of humanity or civilization, but for the aggrandizement and greed and lust of the ruling classes.

The devastation caused by the tyrants and conquerors of the middle ages and of antiquity has been reproduced in our times by the rush to obtain wealth. Even the lust of conquest, in order to obtain slaves and tribute and great estates, by means of which the ruling classes could live in boundless luxury, so characteristic of the earlier civilization, is reproduced in our time.

Witness the recent conduct of the nations of Europe toward Crete and Greece, upholding the most terrible despotism in the world because each hopes for a favorable opportunity to obtain some advantage, leading ultimately to the largest share of the spoil.

Witness the struggles in Africa and Asia, where millions of foreign people may be enslaved and bled for the benefit of their new rulers.

The whole world, says Wallace, is but a gambling table. Just

as gambling deteriorates and demoralizes the individual, so the greed for dominion demoralizes governments. The welfare of the people is little cared for, except so far as to make them submissive taxpayers, enabling the ruling and moneyed classes to extend their sway over new territories and to create well-paid places and exciting work for their sons and relatives.

Hence, says Wallace, comes the force that ever urges on the increase of armaments and the extension of empire. Great vested interests are at stake, and ever-growing pressure is brought to bear upon the too-willing governments in the name of the greatness of the country, the extension of commerce, or the advance of civilization. This state of things is not progress, but retrogression. It will be held by the historian of the future to show that we of the nineteenth century were morally and socially unfit to possess the enormous powers for good and evil which the rapid advance of scientific discovery has given us, that our boasted civilization was in many respects a mere superficial veneer, and that our methods of government were not in accord with either Christianity or civilization.

Comparing the conduct of these modern nations, who call themselves Christian and civilized, with that of the Spanish conquerors of the West Indies, Mexico, and Peru, and making some allowances for differences of race and public opinion, Wallace says there is not much to choose between them.

Wealth and territory and native labor were the real objects in both cases, and if the Spaniards were more cruel by nature and more reckless in their methods the results were much the same. In both cases the country was conquered and thereafter occupied and governed by the conquerors frankly for their own ends, and with little regard for the feelings or the well-being of the conquered. If the Spaniards exterminated the natives of the West Indies, we, he says, have done the same thing in Tasmania and about the same in temperate Australia. Their belief that they were really serving God in converting the heathen, even at the point of the sword, was a genuine belief, shared by priests and conquerors alike—not a mere sham as ours is when we defend our conduct by the plea of "introducing the blessings of civilization."

It is quite possible, says Wallace, that both the conquest of Mexico and Peru by the Spaniards and our conquest of South Africa may have been real steps in advance, essential to human progress, and helping on the future reign of true civilization and the well-being of the human race. But if so, we have been and are unconscious agents in hastening the "far-off divine event." We deserve no credit for it. Our aims have been for the most part

sordid and selfish, and our rule has often been largely influenced and often entirely directed by the necessity of finding well-paid places for young men with influence, and also by the constant demands for fresh markets by the influential class of merchants and manufacturers.

More general diffusion of the conviction that while all share the burdens of war, such good as comes from it is appropriated by the few, will no doubt do much to discourage wars; but we must ask whether there may not be another incentive to war which Wallace does not give due weight—whether love of fighting may not have something to do with wars.

As we look backward over history we are forced to ask whether the greed and selfishness of the wealthy and influential and those who hope to gain are the only causes of war. We went to war with Spain because our people in general demanded war. If we have been carried further than we intended and are now fighting for objects which we did not foresee and may not approve, this is no more than history might have led us to expect. War with Spain was popular with nearly all our people a year ago, and, while wise counsels might have stemmed this popular tide, there can be no doubt that it existed, for the evil passions of the human race are the real cause of wars.

The great problem of the twentieth century, as of all that have gone before, is the development of the wise and prudent self-restraint which represses natural passions and appetites for the sake of higher and better ends.

