

**HOW THE UNBORN PLUNDER THE LIVING.**

ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE'S DRASTIC PROPOSAL.

ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE, writing in the *Arena* on "The Railways for the Nation," lays down a principle that carries to its logical conclusion the arguments set forth by Mr. Andrew Carnegie in the last number of the REVIEW. Dr. Wallace would disinherit the unborn, and absolutely forbid the inheritance of wealth by individuals.

**DISINHERIT THE UNBORN!**

This is the way in which Dr. Wallace formulates his principle, which, when it has been thoroughly grasped, he holds, will be seen to solve many problems, and to clear the way to many great reforms in the interest of the people at large:—

This principle is, that the *unborn* can have, and should have, no special property rights; in other words that the present generation shall not continue to be plundered and robbed in order that certain unborn individuals shall be born rich—shall be born with such legal claims upon their fellow-men that, while supplied with all the necessaries, comforts, and luxuries of life they need do no useful work in return. It is not denied that the present generation may properly do work and expend wealth for the benefit of future generations; that is only a proper return for the many and great benefits we have received from those who have gone before us. What this principle says is, that it is absolutely unjust for our rulers (be they a majority or minority) to compel us to pay, to work, or to suffer, in order that certain *individuals* yet unborn shall be endowed—often to their own physical and moral injury—with wealth supplied by the labour of their fellow-men.

Private bequests, above what is sufficient to give nurture and education, must therefore be abolished, and the surplus used to give all an equal start in life.

**THE RIGHTS OF THE LIVING.**

This principle, that no rights to property should be recognised in the unborn, he would apply to the extinction of national debts, the acquisition of railways by the State, and other such cases:—

According to ordinary views of what is right, these various annual payments [of interest]—many millions in amount—must continue to be paid for ever, or be redeemed at their full capital value, which can only be done by laying fresh burdens on present and future generations. Surely the real injustice consists in continuing such burdens for the benefit of any other persons than the actual living receivers, who might be materially injured by their immediate cessation.

**A LIFE INTEREST ONLY IN DIVIDENDS.**

Applying this principle to the acquisition of railways by the State, he says:—

It follows that in all transfers of property from individuals to the State we have only to take account of persons living at the time of the transaction, and of the public interest both now and in the future. When, therefore, the Government determines, for the public good, to take over the whole of the railways, there will be no question of purchase, but simply a transfer of management.

The first step would be to ascertain by inquiry the average annual dividend of each company. The amount of this annual dividend would be paid to every shareholder in the respective companies during their lives, and on their deaths would, except in special cases, revert to the railway department of the

State for the benefit of the public. These exceptions would be—

in the case of all shareholders leaving families or dependents insufficiently provided for, the dividends would continue to be paid to the widow and to unmarried daughters for their lives, and to sons till they reached the age of twenty-one, so as to help towards their education and industrial training. But whenever the shareholder's property was above a certain amount and producing sufficient income to support the family in reasonable comfort—which might, perhaps, be fixed at that of a high-class mechanic—then no such allowance would be made.

**HOW THE PLAN WOULD WORK.**

Summing up the advantages of his proposal when applied to the nationalisation of railways, Dr. Wallace says:—

The most important result of my proposed system of giving shareholders life-annuities, would be, that owing to yearly deaths without direct heirs, outgoing for these annuities would continually diminish, at first slowly, but after a few years at a tolerably uniform rate, so that at the end of two generations—say from sixty to seventy years—the whole enormous sum of the annual dividends would cease to be paid out, and the entire railway system would become unencumbered public property to be worked and administered with a sole view to the public advantage, and especially for the increased well-being of the vast number of railway servants on whose skill, energy, and watchfulness the lives of the whole travelling population depend.