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[p. 2]

‘Daily Notes.’

Though the great frost is gone, and spring is in the air, the water famine of London continues. Vast numbers of London families have for nearly three months been without their house supply. They have suffered, are suffering, and must, it seems, suffer for some time to come, but the water companies are none the worse off, their revenues are secure—revenues for a necessary article of life which they do not supply. The London householder may suffer from the “Act of God,” as the bills of lading say, but the water companies need not, and do not. They do not even suffer the consequences of their own act—past legislation, manufactured by interested parties, took good care that they should not. To take the glaring instance of this year’s frost. Miles of water-pipe have been frozen simply because the pipes were laid too near the surface, or because they were insufficiently protected in that position from possible visitations of frost. The water companies would not incur any expense that might reduce their vast dividends. London might endure a water famine, but the companies must have their huge profits. The London water companies, in short, are, and ever have been, the most striking incarnation of commercial greed, selfishness, and lack of public spirit. As the experiences of this winter are sure to be reproduced in future seasons, it is suggested that a Bill should be introduced into Parliament compelling the companies to adopt proper means for protecting their pipes from frost. It is scandalous that householders should be compelled to pay for goods they do not receive. It is ludicrous and immoral that the supply of an article of necessity, and even of ordinary decency, should be left in the hands of unscrupulous trading companies. It should be supplied cost price by the people for the people, through the County Council, which the companies have just been trying—and not unsuccessfully—to capture for the Obstructives,

Professor Hayward has just been comforting himself and his readers with the reflection that the present age is more distinguished for altruistic feeling than any in history. “A corporate conscience” is, we are assured, awake for the first time in history. There is an entirely new feeling of compassion for the poor, a new sense of “compunction,” and so on. There can be no doubt that there is much in what Professor Hayward says. But still, his examination of the facts is not exhaustive. For a much deeper insight into the actual state of society let us hear what Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace says. Dr. Wallace has brought to the study of contemporary society the same great gifts of observation and reasoning which equipped him for the task of co-discovery with his illustrious friend Darwin. Dr. Wallace has, especially within the last twelve or fifteen years, made the problem of poverty his most careful study. His “Bad Times,” published ten years ago, is a book which every student of the subject should read. He now—and not for the first time—shows by statistics within everybody’s reach that, in spite of the “corporate conscience,” the “compunction,” and so forth, which Professor Hayward writes about, the rich are growing ever richer, and the poor poorer. Clearly, the craze for luxury, the hunger to grow rich without loss of time, the thirst for titular distinction, are not in the smallest degree diminished by that awful spectacle of poverty and destitution which is supposed to touch the heart of the well-to-do. It is impossible to escape Dr. Wallace’s conclusions respecting what he calls “Official Pauperism.” He holds that the statistics of such pauperism are utterly misleading. In London, he says, there are 122,840 “official” paupers. But, he adds, that list leaves out of account a still larger number of poor and destitute people who are provided for by the vast number of charities—fifty of which have been established since 1883. In the year 1893 alone, he says, half a million of money was left in charity, for the relief of the poor, to say nothing of the sums bequeathed for educational and religious purposes. And what, he asks, of the great numbers of people who die, or lead for years a life in death,

because they will neither enter the workhouse nor apply to any of the charitable agencies? This awful problem of pauperism is, he warns legislators, the greatest and most pressing of our time.

*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2023.