

ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE

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OFTEN, of a pair of pioneers, one is forgotten and the other becomes famous. Today Bruno is known to very few, Galileo to many. Charcot is forgotten, Freud is a legend. And so it is with Alfred Russel Wallace and Charles Darwin.

1973 marks the 150th anniversary of Wallace's birth and the 60th of his death, but bonfires will hardly be lit in his honour. Darwin, on the other hand, has become a noun and an adjective as well as a name.

Before Darwin's famous voyage, Wallace took journeys to the Amazon and the Malay Archipelago and studied the geographical distribution of plants and animals. He gave to Darwin the idea of natural selection.

Wallace went beyond Darwin in concluding that the principles governing plants and animals do not apply strictly to man in whose development he saw an additional spiritual element. (Darwin simply could not understand this "defection" of his colleague and deplored it.) Wallace's thoughts in this respect bear a resemblance to those of Henry George particularly in his examination of the Malthusian theory.

Wallace became concerned with economic and so-

² Editor's Note: Drugs are, of course, legalized in Britain only to the extent that addicts are registered and may receive drugs on doctors' prescriptions.

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cial questions and sought to interest Darwin in them. But the latter declared that political economy just confused him and he steered clear of it.

Wallace was influenced by Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* of 1850 especially concerning land reform. "We permit," wrote Wallace, "absolute possession of the soil of our country, with no legal rights of existence on the soil to the vast majority who do not possess it."

John Stuart Mill's Land Reform Association proposed to get the state to appropriate future increments in land values. Wallace joined this group but wanted something more, and he brought out his ideas in his book *Land Nationalisation*. His proposal was that the state acquire land - eventually all the land - by inheritance. The lands of those who died intestate would revert immediately to the state, and all other land would become national property over a period of three generations. Unfortunately, the Land Nationalisation Society that resulted from Wallace's work drifted in another direction and proposed state purchase of land. The Society "would secure to all existing landowners and their heirs revenues equal to the annual value of the land." One wonders by what steps this remarkable perversion took place!

The Society was not Wallace's only disappointment; he was disgusted with Herbert Spencer's defection on the land question and criticised him even more strongly than did Henry George in *A Perplexed Philosopher*. Wallace maintained friendly relations with George during his visit to America and George's visits to England. Both men respected one another, though George did not agree with land nationalisation (his own proposal being that owners retain title to land and that society collect rent through land-value taxation).

In his book *The Wonderful Century* Wallace praised the nineteenth century for its great scientific progress but blamed it for being behind in social progress. Huxley thought that education was the panacea; Wallace argued that that was not enough but that equality of opportunity was the important thing. Spencer thought that evolution would do everything; Wallace said that people must act intelligently and decisively. He opposed the do-nothingness of Mill and the materialism of Darwin.

In so many ways, this versatile man had penetrating insights that reach into our century, whereas the leaders mentioned above seem to stay within the nineteenth century. With his wide-ranging studies and interests Wallace fell just short of a cohesive scientific and philosophic approach to the problems of society. One could wish that it were he rather than Spencer who composed a Synthetic Philosophy.

Nevertheless, Alfred Russel Wallace has left enough of a legacy to deserve a second look and a little more recognition.