

GENERAL.

LIFE OF ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE.

'My Life: A Record of Events and Opinions.' By Alfred Russel Wallace. Large 8vo. 2 vols., pp. 435 and 459. *Map, Portraits, and Illustrations.* London: Chapman & Hall. 1905.

In recording his impressions of a tour in Switzerland, the veteran zoologist, whose two large volumes of autobiography lie before us, thus expresses himself:

"The appreciation of Nature grows with years, and I feel to-day more deeply than ever its mystery and its charms." Some might therefore look in the life-story of the writer who gave us 'The Malay Archipelago' and the essays on 'Tropical Nature' for a more apparent manifestation of such appreciation than is here to be found—a perceptible undercurrent of recognition, as it were, of what a recent writer has termed "the call of the wild." But probably we have no right to complain of the fare provided. Dr. Wallace had many interests besides those of science, and he was right not to go over the ground already traversed in his published books and papers, which are quite accessible.

In the earlier part of the work we have a long excursus on Robert Owen's work in New Lanark, and a whole chapter upon Jack Mytton, with whom the author was not even contemporary; while later there is a good deal which scarcely touches on the author's life, such, for example, as the answers, amusing enough though they may be, for which the British schoolboy is responsible while under examination. Other subjects there are, too, interesting, no doubt, in themselves, such as land-nationalization and mesmerism, which occupy even more space. But we must here confine our notice to those parts of the work which fall more legitimately within our scope.

It is a significant fact that Dr. Wallace found geography one of the most painful subjects he was ever called upon to master at school. No interesting details concerning the countries were ever taught him, he says, and no good maps ever shown—"nothing but a horrid stream of unintelligible place-names." An interest in countries and places unknown to him, and some knowledge of topographical geography, were nevertheless gained by dissected maps of Europe and England, which were among his toys—a point which teachers in geography would do well to lay to heart. For the most part, however, he had to make his own toys, thereby acquiring a manual dexterity which stood him in good stead in his travel days, scarcely less, indeed, than did his early experiences as a land surveyor.

Most persons destined to make a name for themselves as naturalists give early evidences of their tastes, and begin collecting as children. Dr. Wallace reached the age of eighteen apparently before he gave more than a casual thought to bird, or beast, or flower; and this notwithstanding that his work perforce led him to the fields and hedgerows. Curious indeed is the story of how, almost suddenly, he came to develop an interest in plants, and how the mere description, not the sight, of *Dendrobium deonianum*—certainly one of the most fairy-like of orchids—first aroused in him a wish to visit the tropics, combined with his reading of Humboldt's 'Personal Narrative.' Malthus's 'Principles,' which came into his hands about this time, was the source, he considers, whence twenty years later he obtained the long-sought clue to the effective agent in the evolution of species.

While schoolmastering in Leicester in the year 1844, the author first met Bates, and the study of the latter's collection of beetles drew his attention to another branch of natural history, and ultimately brought about the Amazon journey. But it is remarkable that before this, and when he had been interesting himself but a very short time—not more than four years—in natural science, he had already begun to speculate upon the origin of species. The Amazon journey is dismissed in a single chapter, and the long years spent in the Malay archipelago in two. Dr. Wallace no doubt thinks, and rightly, that his previously published accounts are sufficient. With these outlines, then, we come to the second volume, which opens with what is practically the most important chapter in the book. It bears the name of Darwin at its head, and gives some unpublished letters of the latter, but most of the ground is, of course, covered by the "Life and Letters,"

and there is but little that is new to the student of the history of the hypothesis which we now talk of as Darwinism. Dr. Wallace carefully sums up the differences between his own theories and those of his fellow-discoverers; and, indeed, not the least interesting part of the book is where he discusses his impressions of Huxley, Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and others of the band of great scientific thinkers of whom he is now the sole survivor.

After a rather lengthy account of a tour in America, we pass beyond the domain of geography, and are led *viâ* land-nationalization to socialism, and thence to spiritualism and antivaccination, whither we need not follow. At first we may feel a shade of regret that we cannot exchange these subjects for others more germane to the sciences to which the author was so distinguished a contributor, but perhaps it is better so. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and the autobiography would lose its value as a human document were the author's own perspective to be disregarded. Dr. Wallace's volumes are of very real interest, it is needless to say, to the philosopher and the political economist as well as to the zoologist and to the geographer.
