

REVIEWS.

WALLACE THE WISE MAN.

"My Life." By Alfred Russel Wallace. 2 vols. London: Chapman and Hall. 1905. 25s. net.

NOT until Herbert Spencer, that self-centred egoist, had anyone thought of writing his own life in two huge volumes of five hundred pages each. Dr. Russel Wallace is the only person since Spencer's Autobiography appeared who has ventured to write of himself on such a large scale; and while we fully recognise the very extensive variety and importance in many respects of Dr. Wallace's career we cannot but think he has followed an undesirable precedent in rivalling Spencer's self-expansiveness. Spencer had got into a habit of writing big solemn books and could not help it, while Dr. Wallace has amongst his other accomplishments that of writing for popular audiences, and he should have remembered that too much dwelling on one topic will somewhat depress its intrinsic interest. But it must be admitted that Dr. Wallace has in the mere writing of this autobiography performed a considerable feat. He has reached the advanced age of eighty-two and yet his book or books are wonderfully vigorous and fresh from start to finish. Every reader we should say will skip some pages and his skipping will be directed by his tastes, but we cannot imagine any reader who will not find the greater part of it worth the reading. Those who have an interest in science will fasten on all that Dr. Wallace has to say about his own scientific investigations and researches, and especially on all that relates to that striking fact which has given Dr. Wallace his great place in science, his indisputable title to be regarded as sharing the honours of the discovery of natural selection with Darwin himself—and even of announcing it before him. That is undoubtedly the reason why Dr. Wallace without being chargeable with egregious personal vanity and self-esteem can discourse of himself at so great length. Dr. Romanes, with whom he had one of those personal controversies which enliven these pages, said "Besides the Wallace of natural selection fame there is the Wallace of spiritualism, and astrology, the Wallace of vaccination and the land question, the Wallace of incapacity and absurdity".

We are not joining Romanes in his estimate of Wallace; but it is quite true that if Wallace had been only known for these, no one could have tolerated two big volumes about him. And yet it appears that it is mostly due to the fact of his having been a Wallace of this sort, a knight errant of all kinds of unscientific heresies, that Wallace acquired a popularity sufficiently to make an extensive autobiography a possible enterprise for author and publisher. Dr. Wallace himself says that it was the publication of the book asserting the earth to be the centre of the stellar system, and which deduces therefrom that probably the earth alone has evolved anything like human life, that gave him a wider circle of readers than he had ever had before, and gave a possible public for his autobiography. Well that is the way with the public: it likes a comfortable scientific heresy. Though the men of science might pass by such a book in silence it provided solace against materialistic evolution which has on the whole been distressing to pious people. It restores man to his self-esteem and Wallace again comes forward as the exponent of a science which allows far more play of the religious feelings than Darwinism in the hands of most of its exponents has seemed to permit. From the beginning Dr. Wallace has held this position of mediator. In its material aspect his theory of natural selection was the same as that which Darwin was working out patiently when Wallace's letter with its paper came to him from the East, containing the solution of the problem which had come upon him "in a flash". But he has always left room for the interposition of a spiritual power, for which Darwin did not provide, to develop that part of man's nature which distinguishes him from the lower animals. So that Wallace was not only one of the band who were the champions of Darwinism, but his name could be quoted even with more authority than the rest, and he

was on the side of the spiritual. Wallace's explanation of the spiritual is not that which most readers of "Miam's Place in the Universe" would be able to approve, as it includes what is technically known as "Spiritualism." A large part of this autobiography consists of Wallace's experiences in occult manifestations. To a reader who is not in some degree acquainted with the subject this portion of the book will cause him extreme surprise and probably some discomfort; the experiences are so strange and uncanny. We do not quite know what a person who fortifies himself with Wallace's scientific authority in favour of the spiritual, but who will not hear of spiritualism, will make of Wallace's immense confidence in the phenomena of spiritualism as demonstrated by experiments having to him the solidity of scientific evidence. But one thing is clear: the name of Wallace has, with that of Sir William Crookes, impressed many people with the idea that there must be something in it in spite of the trickery and fraud it has been mixed up with. Dr. Wallace does not say so in so many words, but his numerous references to the direction of his life all through by influences from spiritual sources suggest that he has in his mind something of this kind when he speaks of the sudden intuition which came to him of the true answer to the problem of the creation of species. But he mentions a more concrete fact which is of interest: it was at any rate through the medium of Malthus' "Population" that his inspiration came. It will be remembered too that Darwin also speaks of this book as leading him to the same train of thought. The coincidence is certainly striking.

Anti-vaccination and phrenology are two other scientific heresies which Dr. Wallace defends at large in his autobiography. Socialism is a belief which we can hardly speak of as a heresy because there are at least a sufficient number of adherents to make a very respectable show if we include all the varieties; but Dr. Wallace is one of the most extreme. Perhaps he is more properly described as an anarchist whose ultimate belief is that men are capable enough and virtuous enough not to need government at all if they could have a fair chance. But on this point Dr. Wallace is only one of many who speak on a subject on which he has no special authority. On this account his socialism, or whatever it is, may be considered less patiently than his other long disquisitions on vaccination and phrenology in this autobiography. They appear more or less closely connected with the scientific inquiries to which he has been accustomed. And as regards phrenology, we may say of it what we said of spiritualism, that his account of it as he has studied it and practised it himself is of a nature to hold one in some doubt before deciding against it. We had, of course, not to wait for Dr. Wallace's autobiography before forming some opinion of his mental characteristics. He had displayed himself demonstratively enough in his other writings; but his autobiography is a fuller revelation of his personality. Almost we are persuaded to become phrenologists when we read the record of the two lecturers on phrenology, who, though he was unknown to them during his youth and at different times and places, placed on record a character of him which has a striking air of accuracy. Where our knowledge does not enable us to check it, Dr. Wallace assures the reader that it is equally true as to those intellectual or moral characteristics the secrets of which only are known, or best known, to himself, and not to others, unless apparently they are phrenologists. For instance Dr. Wallace informs us that a lack of confidence in himself may appear the last thing of which he might be suspected; and yet he adds, with a touch of humour which most of us can appreciate, that his apparent boldness is often only assumed to encourage himself and hide his real diffidence.

What effect Dr. Wallace's name may have had on the vaccination controversy we cannot say, but he made a distinguished convert in the late Lord Grimthorpe. A characteristic letter is reproduced in which Lord Grimthorpe says "Lest I should be thought to include your appendix of a socialistic nostrum or 'Remedy for Want' in my general approval of your book I think it prudent to add that I consider it more demonstrably

wrong and ruinous to any country that should adopt it than any disease that has ever been propagated; but I am not going to discuss that. I only add that you may either publish this if you like or announce me as a 'fourth convert' to anti-vaccination under your treatment—and such as Dr. Bond's". We need say nothing here on any of these topics except that the autobiography is too largely a collection of controversial pamphlets upon them. They overlay the properly biographical element. Dr. Wallace has written much the same kind of things elsewhere if we want to read them. But, speaking of the legitimately biographical portions of the volumes, they are the records of a remarkable man of original character and mind and of diversified experiences who, simply by following the bent of his own genius, and with little aid from regular education, has made himself a part of the scientific history of the last century.
