REVIEWS.

WALACE THE WISE MAN.

"My Life." By Alfred Russel Wallace. 2 vols.

London: Chapman and Hall. 1905. 2s. net.

N OT 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 recognize the superiority of his work to any other hitherto attempted, we regret that 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 print 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 books 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 anyone who will not find the greater part of it worth the reading. If this book was to be fastened on all that Dr. Wallace has to say about spiritualism, and astrology, and the Wallace of vaccination and the land question, the fame there is the Wallace of spiritualism, and astrology, only known for these, no one could have tolerated two pages, said "Besides the Wallace of natural selection and Darwinism in the hands of most of its exponents there is the Wallace of incapacity and absurdity", "We are not joining Romanes in his estimate of Wallace's scientific authority in favour of the spiritual, but to him the solidity of scientific evidence. But one will fasten on all that Dr. Wallace has to say about spiritualism, and astrology, that Wallace acquired a popularity sufficiently great 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, which deduces therefrom that probably the earth alone has evolved anything like his life, that led 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 provides an escape from purely materialistic ideas. It 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 been that Darwinism, in his handwriting, that which Darwin 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 no doubt been curiously the same as that 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 his book will approve, as it includes what is technically known as "Spiritualism." A large part of this autobiography consists of Wallace's experiences in occult manifesta- tions. 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; but it is equally true as to those intellectual or moral characteristics the secrets of which only are known, to himself, and not to others, unless apparently 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 only assumed to encourage himself and hide his real diffidence.

The 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.