

BOOK NOTICES

Social Environment and Moral Progress. By Alfred Russel Wallace. New York: Cassell & Co., 1913. Pp. vi+181. \$1.25.

This volume has been much reviewed and much misunderstood. The author makes extreme statements in a manner which repels many who pick up the book for cursory examination, and which therefore tends to hinder a careful and unprejudiced consideration of its claims. The following sentence, italicized by the author, illustrates our point: "Taking account of . . . undoubted facts, many of which are so gross, so terrible, that they cannot be overstated, it is not too much to say that our whole system of society is rotten from top to bottom, and the social environment as a whole, in relation to our possibilities and our claims, is the worst that the world has ever seen" (p. 169). The book contains a great deal of matter, both statistical and argumentative, which is being presented more tactfully and acceptably by other writers. If it were merely the reprinting of a series of campaign speeches, its form would be excusable; but the volume does not have that character. As a treatise, it bears the marks of hurried preparation; and if it came from the pen of an unknown writer, instead of from the distinguished hand of Darwin's evolutionary co-discoverer and colleague, it would

hardly have commanded the attention it has received.

Careful study of the book shows that Mr. Wallace has really done himself injustice through excess of zeal. He admits that up to the end of the eighteenth century, modern civilization was very crude and stationary, and that the sudden application of labor-saving machinery in the nineteenth century put too great a stress upon society (pp. 49, 50.) Such being the case, the social evils of the nineteenth century (many of which persist until now) could hardly have been avoided. A hundred years or so is a short span in the life-history of the human race. Moreover, the author concedes that much progress has been made toward the realization of social wrongs to such an extent that "the omens for the future are good" (p. 137). Elsewhere he writes, in a strain which would do credit to a Christian seer, "The divine nature in us—that portion of our higher nature which raises us above the brutes, and the influx of which makes us men—cannot be lost, cannot even be permanently deteriorated by conditions however adverse, by training however senseless and bad. It ever remains in us, the central and essential portion of our *human* nature, ready to respond to every favorable opportunity that arises, to grasp and hold firm every fragment of high thought or noble action that has been

brought to its notice, to oppose even to the death every falsehood in teaching, every tyranny in action" (pp. 128, 129). It appears, then, that the book has been misjudged, and that its famous author is more of an optimist and seer than many have supposed. His remedy for all evils is socialism (p. 171).
