MR. ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE AND THE
MEDICAL PROFESSION.

MR. WALLACE, despite the manner in which at different
times he has suffered pulverisation at the hands of Dr.
McVail, and in his cross-examination before the Royal
Commission on Vaccination, has written yet another
pamphlet, in which, under the title of "Vaccination a
Delusion; its Penal Enforcement a Crime," he reiterates
all his old arguments, all his old fallacies, and, be it
added, all his old sins of omission. On this occasion he
takes up an altogether independent attitude and he "appeals
from the medical and official apologists of vaccination to
the intelligence and common-sense of his fellow country-
men." So strong, indeed, seems his bias against the
profession as a whole that he has, we infer, not even con-
descended to seek the most elementary assistance of those
members of it whose names are household words amongst
the anti-vaccinationists, and alone he sets forth to tread the
thorny paths of medical science. Before the bottom of the
very first page is reached a serious calamity befalls him and
he tells his "fellow-countrymen" that typhus (obviously
not a misprint for "typhoid") fever is believed to be com-
municated by specifically contaminated water. Surely after
this we see why he deemed
it
inexpedient to appeal to the
medical profession. In the next page or two Mr. Wallace
flounders badly and under the heading of "Vaccination
and the Medical Profession" he urges the old but
obviously illogical argument that "as the profession has a
pecuniary interest in perpetuating vaccination it can form
no unbiased opinion upon the value of the operation."
Can the author support this charge against the pro-
fession? Would nothing accrue to it if vaccination were
abolished and small-pox substituted, as the medical pro-
fession believes it undoubtedly would be, in its stead.
Would not the treatment of one case of small-pox for,
say, three weeks more than counterbalance in a pecuniary
sense the vaccination of many children? What, too, has
Mr. Wallace to say as to the action of the medical pro-
fession as a whole in promoting in such an obviously
self-denying fashion the growth of sanitary reform, which
has done so much, according to the anti-vaccinationists,
to check small-pox? Will he charge the profession with
obstructing sanitary progress and with specifically
polluting water-supplies in order that typhus (?) fever may
flourish? But we cannot, Mr. Wallace tells us, even
count properly. There is much evidence, he says, to
show that "doctors are bad statisticians and have a
special faculty for mistaking figures" — and he im-
plies that his own mental processes are in an alto-
gether peculiar degree fitted for accurate statistical re-
search. Let us verify this implication by reference to the
evidence given by Mr. Wallace before the Royal Commission,
noting, by the way, that at his first interview he committed
so many errors that he asked to be allowed a second inter­
view in order to correct and amplify some of his statements.
His final leave-taking of the Commission may therefore be
regarded as his ripened judgment and the acme of his
knowledge upon all points relating to vaccination. It is
generally accepted that the evidence with regard to small­
pox and vaccination as illustrated in our small-pox hospitals
is at least of some value, but Mr. Wallace seems to think
such a study, to say the least of it, inconvenient. Here is a
question put to Mr. Wallace by the Chairman on the occasion
of his first examination:—

(Q. 7069.) “Have you examined the statistics with regard
to the Metropolitan Asylum Board’s hospitals?” (A.) “I
have not paid much attention to them.”

Similarly upon his second visit to the Commission, when he
returned especially to supplement his evidence he was asked
by Sir William Savory—

(Q. 9729.) “Have you gone into the question of the Fever
Hospital?” (A.) “I daresay it would be instructive, but as
I say, the subject would be so tremendously vast, and the
time required to hunt up evidence would be so enormous,
that unless one lived in London one could not do it; and I
live 120 miles away.”

(Q. 9730.) “But you have made your reputation by
thoroughly sifting evidence before you came to a con­
clusion?” (A.) “Some kind of evidence.”

Does this mean that it is Mr. Wallace’s custom to omit such
evidence as tells against any thesis he may be interested in
developing? All Mr. Wallace’s evidence may be found in
the third report of the Commission and we commend it to
our readers. They will then understand why Mr. Wallace
speaks of the report as a “feeble report,” and why vacci­
nation “never saved a single life.” It is narrated in Sir
John Simon’s “Papers Relating to the History and Practice
of Vaccination” that a certain Prince Kaunitz forbade two
words to be uttered in his presence: the one was “small­
pox” and the other “death.” We expect Mr. Wallace’s
best friends omit all reference to Dr. McVail or to the Royal
Commission on Vaccination when in the presence of this
distinguished expert on inductive and deductive methods.