Mr. Wallace, in his preface, hesitates to declare categorically the purpose of this volume. He says, "It may perhaps be termed an appreciation of the century—of what it has done and what it has left undone." So considered, it is not a strong performance—is strangely incompetent for a strong man like Wallace. Does it not sound a bit like a school-boy's composition to hear an age criticised substantially in this fashion: "It has achieved some splendid successes, but it has fallen into some lamentable errors"? Of any human production whatever we know in advance that it will have its merits and its faults. What we ask of the major critic is to make it plain to us what the psychological qualities are, and what the experience and discipline have been out of which merits and defects have alike sprung. To do this for the nineteenth century, with the manifold agencies that have gone to make it what it is, is, no doubt, a problem of the most intricate. And yet there is one word that
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goes so far towards formulating the age, and is, at the same time, so obvious, that one cannot easily pardon its omission from the slightest description of the century. That word is Accuracy. To the spirit of accuracy (derived ultimately from the seventeenth-century mathematics, whose ideas the eighteenth had pumped into every cranny of thought) may be historically traced the larger part of the characteristic traits of the nineteenth century, even in cases where these seem to be of quite the contrary complexion. Of this Mr. Wallace tells us nothing. He never so much as mentions even precision in machinery as a vital factor in the evolution of some of our grandest ideas, such as the conservation of energy. The course of events was this: precision in the machine-shops made the application of the steam engine to ocean vessels practicable; the necessity of accurate economy of coal on those vessels stimulated, as their engines aided, the study of the theory of heat; the mechanical theory of heat easily suggested the conservation of energy.

No account of the achievements of the nineteenth century can be considered satisfactory which, like this, is confined to the physical and natural sciences, and the arts connected with them, and says nothing at all of projected geometry nor the theory of functions in mathematics, nothing of the logic of relatives, nothing of psychological measurements, nothing of the ascertainment of laws in the growth of languages, nothing of Egyptology nor of the decipherment of the cuneiform inscriptions, nor of the excavations about the Aegean and their results, nothing of the rewriting of every branch of history, nothing of Ricardo and later economists. Nor ought such a description to be confined to science: In poetry, romance, music, painting, our century may claim to have gone deeper than the last. It is not altogether wanting even in improvements in the organization of society. Laws have been reformed, slaves emancipated, education extended, women treated seriously; sobriety, decency, and self-restraint generally, respected and demanded. To talk of appreciating the nineteenth century without the slightest thought of any of these things is so extraordinarily superficial that we are justified in suspecting that Mr. Wallace has not made the application of the steam engine to ocean vessels practicable; the necessity of accurate economy of coal on those vessels stimulated, as their engines aided, the study of the theory of heat; the mechanical theory of heat easily suggested the conservation of energy.

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